THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE'S POET

DANIEL L. MARSH

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JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY
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of the
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By

DANIEL L. MARSH

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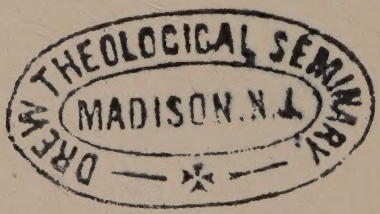

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THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE'S POET

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CHAPTER I

The People's Poet

ONCE upon a Chautauqua platform I delivered a lecture-recital entitled "James Whitcomb Riley, Our Typical American Poet." At the close of the lecture-recital, a preacher who was present said to me:

"I do not agree with your subject. I do not think that James Whitcomb Riley is the 'typical American poet.'"

In my reply I insisted that while he wrote for the human heart the world around, yet he was thoroughly American in his heredity, his residence, his themes and his habits of thought.

"With all of this, I will agree," responded my critic; "but still I do not think your subject is true."

"In what particular?" I inquired.

"Simply because I do not consider him a poet at all," was the rejoinder.

"Pray, then, what is he?" I asked.

"Oh," he replied, "just a rhymster—just a rhymster. I like to think of a poet as one who deals with the great profound things of life in a profound way. Now Riley's stuff is simple, shallow, flung off in a hurry. I would not call him a poet at all."

I report this only because it is so thoroughly exceptional. Out of the tens of thousands of people before whom I have spoken on Riley, that is the only time I have ever heard anybody raise a doubt about his enduring poethood; and thus, by striking contrast, the genuineness of my thesis is demonstrated, that James Whitcomb Riley is the typical American poet of this generation.

And yet, my preacher friend gave voice to a very common heresy: that anything that is simple and easily understood is not profound and has not required much work. People often imagine that anything that is abstruse and involved and difficult to be seen through is the product of great labor and profound thought.

But did you ever stop to think that when you can not see to the bottom of a stream, it is not necessar-

ily because it is so deep: maybe it is just muddy! It requires far more work and far more brains to express a profound truth simply than to enshroud it in the vagueness of high-sounding phrases.

Riley mastered the magic secret of poetry: simplicity! He steered clear of choriambics and hendecasyllabic verse. That is one reason why he is the People's Poet. But in his simple style he dealt with the profoundest thoughts of life. What are the profoundest thoughts of life? God, man, sin, conscience, immortality, patriotism, nature. Did Riley deal with these subjects in a profound way? In answer I ask only that you read the following chapters of this book.

But his simple verses were not "just flung off." For the most part they are the result of assiduous toil. He told me once when I called on him in his home in Lockerbie Street, Indianapolis, that he had always done his best work at night, after the rest of the household had retired and he locked his door and worked alone. He said that sometimes he worked for a whole night on a single line of poetry. Once he remarked to a friend that he had always done more work with the rubber end of his pencil than with the point of it! It is well for young peo-

ple to be told that story; for excellence never lies this side of drudgery. Pope knew what he was talking about when he said:

> "Pensive poets painful vigils keep,
> Sleepless themselves to give their readers sleep."

The magic and the mystery of the poet is to transfigure life and its environment, under the stimulus of emotion and prophetic insight. To be a poem, this transfiguring speech must flow in measured pulse and conform to a definite word-pattern. This throbbing pulse-beat which we call *rhythm* is as essentially the life of the poem as is the coursing warm blood the life of the body. Everywhere in the universe there is rhythm: the swinging of the stars in their eternal orbits without variation; the succession of the seasons; the beating of the waves upon the beach; the throbbing of our own hearts. The rhythmic march lightens the pack upon the soldier's back, and the rhythmic movement gives pleasure to the folk-dancer. Likewise, whatever may be the source of the poet's emotion, his verse moves to an accordant rhythm, imparting to the hearer its own energy and stirring him with a kindred emotion. Note how true this is of the quick unbending

march of Homer's dactylic hexameters, narrating the achievements of heroes; of the majestic flow of Milton's iambic pentameter, disclosing a drama of Heaven and hell; of the stately soaring flight of Bryant's Waterfowl; of the quickening, throbbing roll of Riley's "The Drum":

"O the drum!
There is some
Intonation in thy grum
Monotony of utterance that strikes the spirit dumb,
As we hear,
Through the clear
And unclouded atmosphere,
Thy palpitating syllables roll in upon the ear!

"There's a part
Of the art
Of thy music-throbbing heart
That thrills a something in us that awakens with a start,
And in rhyme
With the chime
And exactitude of time,
Goes marching on to glory to thy melody sublime."

These are only the first two stanzas. Read the entire poem aloud and see if your emotions are not stirred the same as if you were listening to the roll of the drum at the head of a column of marching soldiers that carry the old flag by!

Have you ever been walking along a country road when a shower of rain came up, and do you recall the rhythmic soft sound of the patter of the raindrops in the dust? You can hear it again in a stanza from that universally popular ballad of Riley's, "Out to Old Aunt Mary's":

"It all comes back so clear to-day!
Though I am as bald as you are gray,—
Out by the barn-lot and down the lane
We patter along in the dust again,
As light as the tips of the drops of the rain,
Out to Old Aunt Mary's."

And you can not read the following two lines from "When the Frost Is On the Punkin" without hearing the hiss-swiss-siss-rasping sound of frosted blades of corn or of fallen autumn leaves as you wade through them:

"The husky, rusty russel of the tossels of the corn,
And the raspin' of the tangled leaves, as golden as the morn."

Neither can you read aloud the following two lines without hearing the ticking of a clock:

"O, it sets my hart a-clickin', like the tickin' of a clock,
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock."

In all of Riley's poetry the rhythm is faultless.

But it takes more than rhythm to make a poem. Mechanically speaking, the musical charm of all good poetry depends upon the subtle but natural adjustment of all other formal elements with this regulating and harmonizing effect of meter. Words are the only medium of expression available to a poet. A musician works with tone, a sculptor with form, and a painter with color; but a poet must work with words. Once, so a story goes, an inquisitive friend said to Mr. Riley:

"I understand you are now getting a dollar a word for your poetry. Is that so?"

When Riley confirmed the rumor, the inquisitive friend continued:

"Pretty easy money, isn't it?"

To which the poet replied: "It is if you can find the right word!"

Words have a certain sensuous value in themselves. When they are used by a poet as instruments of beauty, they add the element of melody to the rhythmic structure of a poem. The simplest method by which this tonal quality is secured is *rhyme,* which is the correspondence in two or more words or lines of terminal sounds beginning with an accented vowel, preceded by different consonant

sounds, as, for example, "folds" and "golds," "pets" and "lets," "spill" and "sill," etc., in Riley's "A Fruit Piece":

"The afternoon of summer folds
Its warm arms round the marigolds.

"And, with its gleaming fingers, pets
The watered pinks and violets

"That from the casement vases spill
Over the cottage window-sill,

"Their fragrance down the garden walks
Where droop the dry-mouthed hollyhocks."

Another part of the melodic element is *alliteration,* which is the repetition of the same letter or sound in two or more words in the same line. To make good poetry, alliteration must never be forced or strained after; it must be so natural that you do not know it is there until you stop to hunt for it, as the recurring *"t's"* in this line from "A Tale of the Airly Days":

"Tell me a tale of the timber-lands,"—

or the two *"j's"* in this line from "Out to Old Aunt Mary's":

"The jelly—the jam and the marmalade,"—

or the two *"s's"* and three *"p's"* in this line:

"And the sweet-sour pickles of peach and pear."

It is really a fine art to know how to use alliteration without making it appear to be striven for—and Riley has mastered the art.

Another mark of good poetry, so far as the emotional and sensuous appeal is concerned, is an abundant use of the most musical letters of the alphabet, namely, *"l," "m"* and *"n."* But here again the use must not be forced; it must be so natural that we revel in the sweet music of the poetry without having these mellifluous consonants obtrude themselves upon our notice. Here, also, Riley has succeeded. As an illustration of this, require yourself to observe the use he has made of *"l," "m"* and *"n"* in the following stanza from "Out to Old Aunt Mary's":

"And the old spring-house, in the cool green gloom
Of the willow trees,—and the cooler room
Where the swinging shelves and the crocks were kept,
Where the cream in a golden languor slept,
While the waters gurgled and laughed and wept—
Out to Old Aunt Mary's."

The foregoing stanza is also a good illustration of *tone-color,* a subtle quality which suggests the

meaning of words by the sound and value of their syllables, as:

"The old spring-house, in the cool green gloom,"

or

"Where the cream in a golden languor slept,"

where the slow change in vowel quality produces a feeling in one like looking at that part of a picture where the shade gradually blends with the light.

Truly, measured by all these standards, Riley is a poet.

But poetry is more than the painfully exact language of the class-room; it is the free, capricious melody of nature. It is more than the thought-out music of the head; it is one uninterrupted voluntary of the heart. It is more than rhyme and jingling sensibilities and measure and cadence; it is the application of ideas to life. Life and poetry belong together. When they are divorced, poetry becomes artificial and anæmic, and life becomes sordid and dull. Mr. Riley's work stands out preeminently because of its naturalness, exuberance, vitality and sincerity. It is always spirited, fresh, original and full of the sap of life. His poems are the "genuine article," as we would say in the parlance of the

street, or "The Ginoine Ar-tickle," as he calls it in the Hoosier dialect:

"Talkin' o' poetry,—There're few men yit
'At's got the stuff b'iled down so's it'll pour
Out sorgum-like, and keeps a year and more
Jes' sweeter ever' time you tackle it!
Why, all the jinglin' truck 'at hes been writ
Fer twenty year and better is so pore
You cain't find no sap in it any more
'N you'd find juice in puff-balls!—AND I'D
QUIT!
What people wants is facts, I apperhend;
And naked Natur is the thing to give
Your writin' bottom, eh? And I contend
'At honest work is allus bound to live.
Now them's my views; 'cause you kin recommend
Sich poetry as that from end to end."

But not only is he *a poet,* he is *the Poet of the People.* His poems stand the final test of the millions. He has endeared himself to a wider range of humanity than any other American poet. Our most popular poets before him were Longfellow and Whittier, and their most popular poems were "Hiawatha" and "Snow-Bound." But neither one was ever read by a tithe of the people who read any number of Riley's rhymes. Where one person on a beautiful June day will quote the opening line of Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal," a dozen people

will be talking about Riley's "Knee-Deep in June," and on a keen frosty autumn morning it seems as though everybody one meets were familiar with "When the Frost is on the Punkin and the Fodder's in the Shock." In any unselected group of Americans, read the titles of the best-known poems of any dozen poets you please, including among them Riley's "An Old Sweetheart of Mine," and have the people vote by ballot the poem with which they are most familiar, and it is a safe guess that an overwhelming majority will vote "An Old Sweetheart of Mine."

The responsive tenderness of his heart has won lettered and unlettered, rich and poor, high and low, because it finds its way over the fruitful levels where men are equal. He has glorified the emotions, sorrows, struggles and triumphs of those who live and toil, love and are true. He has become the Poet Laureate of the People, not by any royal decree but by the common consent and judgment of his countrymen.

He is a bard of the old line—of the line of Burns, Shelley and Poe. The immortal spirit of song that moves with the race, singing of the things that it

loves, was truly in James Whitcomb Riley. Shelley says that "Poets are the hierophants of unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present." Possessors of this spirit of song are all one tribe, whether they be harpers among the herdsmen, prophets in the presence of kings, minstrels or troubadours, ballad pedlers or poet laureates. They are a tribe to which is bequeathed the honor and glory of preserving whatever is fine and worth while in the spirit of the times.

Superficial people think that Riley's verses are intensely local; they dismiss them as provincial. But they are no more provincial than are the poems of honey-lipped Theocritus who sang at the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus sixteen hundred years before Riley sang among the farmsteads of Indiana. There is no apparent polish about our Poet of the People, and yet even his most idiomatic and uncouth Hoosier dialect verses describe relations of men, emotions of men, yearnings of men, beliefs of men that are common to the race. Nothing human is foreign to him. There is something spacious and robust in his humanity, something that gives it a

truly Elizabethan tone. He combines, in a most unusual degree, the homespun phrase with the lyric feeling.

The love of a man for a maid is a theme that has remained unchanged, unhackneyed, inexhaustible. The sentiment that was felt by Daphnis and Chloe is the same that breathes through Riley's "Farmer Whipple—Bachelor." We love its humanness and its homely sincerity:

"I remember onc't in harvest, when the 'cradle-in'' was done,
(When the harvest of my summers mounted up to twenty-one),
I was ridin' home with Mary at the closin' o' the day—
A-chawin' straws and thinkin', in a lover's lazy way!"

One reason why he is so popular is because he is so thoroughly real. His realm is on the unclouded confines of the natural, the genuine, the true, and there he delights to surround himself with images of beauty and of sweet confidence, to plant his homes and fields and flower gardens in a day upon which the sun should ever shine. He is real—that is the reason why men read him and love him. He wraps round all of his poems the atmosphere of perfect reality. And therefore, in "The Rhymes of Ironquill" he has truly pictured the way in which

many common Americans have received his own poems. The man professed that he did not care for poetry; but his wife brought home a volume of these poems which were true to nature, and—well, let Riley tell it:

"And then she made *me* read the thing,
And found my specs and all:
And I jest leant back there—i jing!—
My cheer ag'inst the wall—
And read and *read,* and read and *read,*
All to myse'f—ontil
I lit the lamp and went to bed
With Rhymes of Ironquill!

"I propped myse'f up there, and—*durn!*—
I never shet an eye
Till daylight!—hogged the whole concern
Tee-total, mighty nigh!—
I'd sigh sometimes, and cry sometimes,
Er laugh jest fit to kill—
Clean *captured*-like with them-air rhymes
O' that-air Ironquill!"

His analytical subtlety, meticulousness, refinement of reasoning, and propriety and power of language —the good faith with which he manages the evocation and exhibition of his real and common and attractive creations—enables him to meet and master every mood of his readers, so that people who would

think it a mark of weakness to be caught reading any poetry at all, and especially poems of sentiment, do read any number of Riley's rhymes, and cry over his poems of sentiment. Take, for example, "Thet-Air Young-Un," which tells the story of a little boy who loved to wander along the mill stream, who loved nature and was always wondering what the water was talking of, and one day they missed him, and—oh, tears blind us, for it is the story of the universal father of all little children who have passed out of sight beyond the River of Death:

> "Found his hat 'way down below
> Hinchman's Ford.—'Ves' Anders he
> Rid and fetched it. Mother she
> Went *wild* over that, you know—
> Hugged it! kissed it!—*Turribul!*
> My hopes then was all gone too. . . .
> Brung him in, with both hands full
> O' warter-lilies—'peared-like new-
> Bloomed fer him—renched whiter still
> In the clear rain, mixin' fine
> And finer in the noon sunshine. . . ."

Provincial? Oh, no! He conjured situations that might have arisen in Sicily sixteen hundred years ago or in Judea four thousand years ago; and which will keep on recurring as long as human be-

ings shall inhabit the earth. He dug beneath the problems of the passing day for his inspiration. The tears in his verse are for the common heartaches of humanity. He wraps this universality of appeal in an atmosphere of perfect reality. Look at "Nothin' to Say" with this in mind: You can feel the utter loneliness of the old man who has an only daughter, and she wants to get married, and she has come to ask her father whether he has any objection, and it makes the heartbroken old man yearn for her mother who has been dead these many years, and he feels that he can not give his daughter up, yet he does not want to interfere with her happiness, so with a loving sob he repeats over and over, "Nothin' to say":

"Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!
Gyrls that's in love, I've noticed, giner'ly has their way!
Yer mother did, afore you, when her folks objected to me—
Yit here I am and here you air! and yer mother—where is
she?

"You look lots like yer mother: purty much same in size;
And about the same complected; and favor about the eyes:
Like her, too, about livin' here, because *she* couldn't stay;
It'll 'most seem like you was dead like her!—but I hain't got
nothin' to say.

"She left you her little Bible—writ yer name acrost the page—
And left her ear-bobs fer you, ef ever you come of age;
I've alluz kep' 'em and gyuarded 'em, but ef yer goin' away—
Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!

"You don't rickollect her, I reckon? No: you wasn't a year old then!
And now yer—how old *air* you? W'y, child, not *'twenty'!* When?
And yer nex' birthday's in Aprile? and you want to git married that day?
I wisht yer mother was livin'!—but I hain't got nothin' to say!

"Twenty year! and as good a gyrl as parent ever found!
There's a straw ketched on to yer dress there—I'll bresh it off —turn round.
(Her mother was jes' twenty when us two run away.)
Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!"

It is this universality of appeal that has made Riley so beloved. The laughter in his verse is not at the broad Rabelaisian humor of some passing Hoosier barnyard joke; it is rather the whimsical humor that is the common chuckle of humanity—a humor which no man with any sense of humor would ever try to define. His humor is unsophisticated. It is not the glittering epigram nor the stinging social satire that delights him, but the homely characterization, the humor of childhood, the jest that is agreeable through its piquancy, as "The Old Tramp":

"A' old Tramp slep' in our stable wunst,
An' the Raggedy Man he caught
An' roust him up, an' chased him off
Clean out through our back lot!

"An' the old Tramp hollered back an' said,—
'You're a *purty* man!—*You* air!—
With a pair o' eyes like two fried eggs,
An' a nose like a Bartlutt pear!'"

The quintessence of humor is the element of surprise. Riley has it. His humor is elfish. In such a poem as "The Flying Islands of the Night" he gives free rein to his fondness for the bizarre and the odd in coining words and images. But his humor is always kindly. There is never any sting in it. There is never any sting in anything he writes. Once "To a Poet-Critic" he wrote:

"Yes,—the bee sings—I confess it—
Sweet as honey—Heaven bless it!—
Yit he'd be a *sweeter* singer
Ef he didn't have no stinger."

He is a thoroughly wholesome poet. It was his proud boast that he had never written a line that could not be read by any person or anywhere.

His training to be the People's Poet was good, not only while he studied in the public school or the

Greenfield Academy or his father's law office; but more particularly in his childhood home,

> "A simple old frame house—eight rooms in all—
> Set just one side the center of a small
> But very hopeful Indiana town,"—

and wandering sun-tanned and bare-footed "Up and Down Old Brandywine" creek, plunging into the "Old Swimmin' Hole," wandering at will across richly scented clover fields, through the hazel thickets,

> "And then in the dust of the road again;
> And the teams we met, and the countrymen;
> And the long highway, with sunshine spread
> As thick as butter on country bread,
> Our cares behind, and our hearts ahead
> Out to Old Aunt Mary's";—

or as a young man bowling over the country with a patent medicine show, or painting signs, or loafing with farmers, or reporting for a country newspaper, learning the little tragedies and comedies of our common life which he later wove with such marvelous skill into his poems, and mastering also the Hoosier dialect which became music upon his lips. As he said of Lewis D. Hayes when he died, so we say of Riley:

"Though he knew Man's force and his purpose,
As strong as his strongest peers,
He knew, as well, the kindly heart,
And the tenderness of tears."

He read omnivorously. He knew about the sorrows of the Greek gods, and the stories of the heroes of old, and the problems of other ages; but the poems he has written are the sort of poems Theocritus would write if he were living in Indiana to-day. "How," asks Carlyle in his Essay on Burns, "How does the poet speak to men with power but by being still more a man than they?" That fits Riley. Once, in accepting his poem entitled, "In Swimming-Time," the editor of the *Century Magazine* wrote Mr. Riley as follows: "I must say that there is nobody at present writing who seems, to me, to get so much of genuine human nature in a short space, as you do." If you think this is too strong, read the following lines picked from the middle of his poem on "A Pen-Pictur' of a Cert'in Frivvolus Old Man":

"'Oh!' he says, 'to wake and be
Barefoot, in the airly dawn
In the pastur'!—thare,' says he,
'Standin' whare the cow's slep' on

> The cold, dewy grass that's got
> *Print* of her jest steamy hot
> Fer to warm a feller's heels
> In a while!—How good it feels!'"

If you were not brought up on a farm you will not be able to appreciate that, and if you were brought up on a farm no comment is necessary.

He was a man of the common people. He knew poverty. He knew what it was to struggle fiercely, tragically, for existence. He knew what it was to have the world turn its cold shoulder on him. He knew the sadness and disappointment of seeing the flowers he plucked turn to ashes in his hands. More than once he felt baffled and almost beaten in life's fierce battle. Later he became well-to-do, *rich* indeed, from his lectures and the royalty on his books. He was lionized and feted by the great ones of earth. Honors were showered upon him. But the money and fame that came to him added nothing to his inspiration, nothing to his happiness. He was still the Poet of the People, faithfully revealing human nature. In "Down to the Capital," he narrates the story of two men who had been chums in their young manhood in Indiana. The one had become rich and was now a Congressman at Washing-

ton. The other was a poor old soldier who had gone to Washington to call on his old friend and get him to secure a pension for him. The poor man returns home, and is telling his neighbors about his visit—about the fine home that his old friend has, and about a reception that was given in it, and then how the rich man crept out with the poor man, and bemoaned the artificiality of his high-priced life:

"'And all I want, and could lay down and *sob* fer, is to know
The homely things of homely life; fer instance, jes' to go
And set down by the kitchen stove—Lord! that 'u'd rest me so,—
Jes' set there, like I ust to do, and laugh and joke, you know.

"'Jes' set there, like I ust to do,' says Fluke, a-startin' in;
'Peared-like, to say the whole thing over to hisse'f ag'in;
Then stopped and turned, and kind o' coughed, and stooped and fumbled fer
Somepin' o' 'nuther in the grass—I guess his handkercher.

"Well, sence I'm back from Washington, where I left Fluke a-still
A-leggin' fer me, heart and soul, on that-air pension bill,
I've half-way struck the notion, when I think o' wealth and sich,
They's nothin' much patheticker'n jes' a-bein' rich!"

It is because his song is so human that the common people hear him gladly—and so do the masters of literature. His poems will stand as an expres-

sion of the tastes and qualities of the people of this age. His personality loves the cheery and hopeful things, clings to simplicity, discovers the quaintly humorous near at hand, and sings life's pathos with compassion, a home-keeping and home-loving poet, depending upon common sights and sounds for his inspirations, and engrossed with the significance of facts. He wants what the people want, "Somep'n Common-Like":

"Somep'n 'at's common-like, and good
And plain, and easy understood;
Somep'n 'at folks like me and you
Kin understand, and relish, too,
And find some sermint in 'at hits
The spot, and sticks and benefits.

"We don't need nothin' extry fine;
'Cause, take the run o' minds like mine,
And we'll go more on good horse-sense
Than all your flowery eloquence;
And we'll jedge best of honest acts
By Nature's statement of the facts.

"So when you're wantin' to express
Your misery, er happiness,
Er anything, 'at's wuth the time
O' telling in plain talk er rhyme—
Jes' sort o' let your subject run
As ef the Lord wuz listenun."

That is the kind of poetry he wrote, and that is the kind of man he was. A defect of character in many otherwise great people is egotism. It has been called a "respectable" sin, but the qualifying adjective does not make it any less a sin. Mr. Riley has wonderfully drawn his own picture, unconsciously, in certain words that he records of Erasmus Wilson. Those of us who know Erasmus Wilson know that they fit him, too. Our poet commends him for his modesty, humility and naturalness—all of them great qualities and all of them marks of the real man. As what we speak of as "common sense" is generally the most uncommon commodity in any community, so also a *common man,* the kind we like and the kind the Poet of the People was, is really very *uncommon,* indeed:

"You're common, as I said afore—
You're common, yit oncommon *more:*—
You allus kindo' 'pear, to me,
What all mankind had ort to be—
Jest natchurl, and the more hurraws
You git, the less you know the cause—
Like as ef God Hisse'f stood by,
Where best on earth hain't half knee-high,
And *seein'* like, and knowin' *He*
'S the Only Grate Man really,
You're jest content to size your hight
With any feller man's in sight.—"

Big, kind, modest Erasmus Wilson, to whom Riley inscribed the poem from which the above lines are taken, once after the whole country had joined in celebrating Riley's birthday, spoke of him as follows:

"As the poet is one who sees and can tell, our poet is one who sees clearly things that are dim and hazy to us; senses distinctly things that are vague dreams to us, and carries us to joyous heights where we cannot climb alone. Truly he is our prophet revealing life to us.

"The fact that so very many of us read Riley proves that he is our sort of a poet. And we are all the better for reading him, because he tells us the things we want to know, or that we only half know, thereby interesting us in things wholesome and helpful.

"And that is just what all this jubilation was about, and not because a big, bumptious, egotistic fellow, with a section of the alphabet appended to his name, had climbed onto a treacherous pedestal and bade us look upon him.

"Our poet lives in little Lockerbie Street, but he belongs to no single town or city or state. His mission being to the people, not alone to the learned and great, but to the common people, his home is with them, not exactly 'boardin' around,' but living with them."

Truly, Riley himself has sized up the People's

Poet in these lines he wrote on "The Poet of the Future":

"O the Poet of the Future! He will come as man to man,
With the honest arm of labor, and the honest face of tan,
The honest heart of lowliness, the honest soul of love
For human-kind and nature-kind about him and above.
His hands will hold no harp, in sooth; his lifted brow will bear
No coronet of laurel—nay, nor symbol anywhere,
Save that his palms are brothers to the toiler's at the plow,
His face to heaven, and the dew of duty on his brow."

CHAPTER II

The Faith of James Whitcomb Riley

NOTWITHSTANDING his immense popularity, very few people ever even think of James Whitcomb Riley as a religious poet. "Oh, yes," they say, "he wrote of home and children and nature—but religion: No!"

Wordsworth described poetry as "the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science"; "the first and last of all knowledge"; "as immortal as the heart of man." If Wordsworth has not overstated the matter (and he has not), it follows that no one can be the best poet without a high, heroic idea of religion. No poet can properly be described as religious simply because of the recurrence of holy phrases in his poems; but rather because of the spirit which permeates the whole, as an incandescent bulb shines through an alabaster vase. James Russell Lowell asserts that reverence is the very primal

essence and life of poetry. "From reverence the spirit climbs on to love, and thence beholds all things." Here again Riley is not found wanting. Reverently does he contemplate the universal laws of the soul. I have read with care every line of his *Complete Works,* and have been deeply impressed how he, as a true seer, often brings to view fragments of the broken table of God's law, and makes known the meaning thereof to his generation. He rarely or never invokes the mythologies. He shows a strict adherence to the ancient beliefs and pieties. There is in him nothing of the modern skeptical mockery which indulges itself in facetious flippancies, counting nothing too sacred for its acid jests.

There are some people in whom the questioning, doubting spirit has grown so strong that they say they can not believe. There are some who think it smart to say that they do not believe; there are others who with hungry eyes and aching heart say that they wish they could believe. Mr. Riley strikes the nail squarely on the head when he says, "We Must Believe," the motif of which is: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Mr. Riley says that from birth we are endowed with love and trust, and

that just as instinctively as the child believes in the parent, so we must believe in God. He says we must believe, because we have been impelled from infancy to seek some clear fulfillment withheld from seekers here on earth. We do not find the perfection or the glories for which we are seeking. We have seen *its promise* in the glories of the physical universe and the tear of sodden sorrow:

"We must believe—
Being from birth endowed with love and trust—
Born unto loving;—and how simply just
That love—that faith!—even in the blossom-face
The babe drops dreamward in its resting-place,
Intuitively conscious of the sure
Awakening to rapture ever pure
And sweet and saintly as the mother's own
Or the awed father's, as his arms are thrown
O'er wife and child, to round about them weave
And wind and bind them as one harvest-sheaf
Of love—to cleave to, and *forever* cleave. . . .
Lord, I believe:
Help Thou mine unbelief.

"We must believe—
Impelled since infancy to seek some clear
Fulfilment, still withheld all seekers here;—
For never have we seen perfection nor
The glory we are ever seeking for:
But we *have* seen—all mortal souls as one—
Have seen its *promise,* in the morning sun—

Its blest assurance, in the stars of night;—
The ever-dawning of the dark to light;—
The tears down-falling from all eyes that grieve—
  The eyes uplifting from all deeps of grief,
Yearning for what at last we shall receive. . . .
        Lord, I believe:
            Help Thou mine unbelief.

"We must believe:
For still all unappeased our hunger goes,
From life's first waking, to its last repose:
The briefest life of any babe, or man
Outwearing even the allotted span,
Is each a life unfinished—incomplete:
For these, then, of th' outworn, or unworn feet
Denied one toddling step—O there must be
Some fair, green, flowery pathway endlessly
Winding through lands Elysian! Lord, receive
  And lead each as Thine Own Child—even the Chief
Of us who didst Immortal life achieve. . . .
        Lord, I believe:
            Help Thou mine unbelief."

No real objection can be raised against making the affirmation of the deep things of religion by faith. Faith is the sixth sense of the soul. It is a worthy organ of confidence in spiritual things. Riley holds in his "Uncle Sidney's Views" that the true age of wisdom is when we are boys and girls and *know* things because we *believe* them no matter whether they agree with laws or not:

"It is *faith*, then, not science and reason, I say,
That is genuine wisdom.—And would that to-day
We, as then, were as wise and ineffably blest
As to live, love and die, and trust God for the rest!"

Riley had a good religious foundation. He was descended from a long line of devout Christians. His grandmother on his father's side, Margaret Slick Riley, often preached—not licensed, but by privilege. She had two brothers who were Methodist preachers. His grandfather Marine, on his mother's side of the house, was also a Methodist preacher. We find traces of Riley's affection for his preacher grandfather in several of his early poems, notably in "The Old-Fashioned Bible," printed in 1881, before he had caught the eye of Fame. In it we can see the little boy with corn-silk white hair, and wide blue eyes, gazing with wonder upon the "gravely severe" face of the Methodist preacher—his grandfather! Ah! blessed days when the future poet laureate of the people went to the Methodist meeting-house, to hear his grandfather preach. Let him tell it in his own way:

"How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood
That now but in mem'ry I sadly review;
The old meeting-house at the edge of the wildwood,
The rail fence and horses all tethered thereto;

The low, sloping roof, and the bell in the steeple,
The doves that came fluttering out overhead
As it solemnly gathered the God-fearing people
To hear the old Bible my grandfather read.
The old-fashioned Bible—
The dust-covered Bible—
The leathern-bound Bible my grandfather read.

"The blessed old volume! The face bent above it—
As now I recall it—is gravely severe,
Though the reverent eye that droops downward to love it
Makes grander the text through the lens of a tear,
And, as down his features it trickles and glistens,
The cough of the deacon is stilled, and his head
Like a haloéd patriarch's leans as he listens
To hear the old Bible my grandfather read.
The old-fashioned Bible—
The dust-covered Bible—
The leathern-bound Bible my grandfather read.

"Ah! who shall look backward with scorn and derision
And scoff the old Book though it uselessly lies
In the dust of the past, while this newer revision
Lisps on of a hope and a home in the skies?
Shall the voice of the Master be stifled and riven?
Shall we hear but a tithe of the words He has said,
When so long He has, listening, leaned out of Heaven
To hear the old Bible my grandfather read?
The old-fashioned Bible—
The dust-covered Bible—
The leathern-bound Bible my grandfather read."

In answer to an inquiry of mine, Mr. Edmund H. Eitel, of Indianapolis, editor of the poet's com-

plete works, his nephew and sometime secretary, wrote me as follows:

"Mr. Riley once told me that he was a member of the Methodist Church, and I said, 'Are you still a member?' because I had heard that he had joined on probation, but was never actually taken into the church. He replied, 'I am a member of the Methodist Church.' So the story I heard was not quite correct. As a young man he was blackboard artist in the Sunday School, and a very effective blackboard artist, too. Many of his first recitations were given in churches, as for instance, one of his early appearances in Indianapolis was in the Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, at which time he recited 'The Bear Story.' This was in 1874."

It has been said that "the cheery optimism, tolerance and mercy that are the burden of his verse summed up his religion." And yet he had some very definite beliefs.

He believed in God. Through a number of years Mr. Riley wrote a long poem of one hundred and five stanzas, which he titled the "Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers." It was written two quatrains on a single white card and these were thrown aside in a haphazard manner through the years. They were all written in the same verse-form and not having any special contiguity of plan resemble somewhat the

"Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam," but they are diametrically opposed to the spirit and faith of Omar's poem. This Doc Sifers is not, strictly speaking, an historical character, but one that Mr. Riley developed in his own imaginings until he came to love the character with an ardent love. He himself says that his poem is an indirect reply to the epicurean pessimism and cynicism found in the other Rubáiyát. Doc Sifers is "a picture of a wholesome, helpful, industrious man—a doctor with hale faith in God and man, in contrast to the old Persian's utterly hopeless doctrine." In many respects, "Doc Sifers" is Riley himself. Again and again our poet affirms his faith in the overruling Providence of a God who is all-wise, merciful and kind. Take, for example, this stanza from the "Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers":

"Doc argies 'at 'The Rey-eyed Law,' as *he* says, 'ort to learn
To lay a mighty leenient paw on deeds o' sich concern
As only the Good Bein' knows the wherefore of, and spreads
His hands above accused and sows His mercies on their heads.'"

He believed in Christ and the gospel He came to proclaim. A friend of mine, the Reverend Doctor W. W. Hall, was holding evangelistic meetings in

Riley's boyhood home, Greenfield, Indiana, in the fall of 1914, less than two years before the poet's death. Mr. Riley sent him a poem which he had entitled "The Evangelist," with this greeting:

"These lines are a greeting to you and an epitome of your first sermon in Greenfield. You are at liberty with them."

And then followed the "lines" as follows:

"Hail, Harbinger of God's Good News!
'Good News' to pulpits and to pews:—
Oh, hear His voice in—'Peace Be still,'
And dwell entwined in His sweet will.

"'The Purpose?' Ah, with glad accord,
Put on the armor of the Lord,
And forth to battle!—all as one,—
The fight! The fight! Is now begun!

"'The Plan?'—'Tis writ with pencil pure,—
Line and dimension straight and sure:—
Inquire of Him—'Lord, what to do?'
Then let Him have His way—in you.

"'The Motive?' That all tongues confess
To Him—our Hope and Righteousness!
Tho' now the view be darkly dim,—
Through faith we'll win the world to Him!

"'And Victory?' It will be won!
God's Promise—through His Promised Son!
We'll sing it in the realms above—
Enraptured by Enraptured Love!"

He believed in the immortal life. Like most of the great realities of religion, he personally submitted it to the test of experience. Marcus Dickey in his revelatory *Youth of James Whitcomb Riley* speaks of the terrific loneliness and sorrow that came into the young man's life through the sudden death of his mother. Mr. Dickey quotes Riley as saying:

"I was alone," said he, "till as in a vision I saw my mother smiling back upon me from the blue fields of love—when lo! she was young again. Suddenly I had the assurance that I would meet her somewhere in another world. I was gathering the fruit of what had been so happily impressed on me in childhood. I had seen that the world is a stage. Now I saw that the universe is a stage. Another curtain had been lifted. My mother was enraptured at the sight of new scenery. It was the dream of Heaven with which 'Johnny Appleseed' had impressed my mother in the Mississinewa cabin."

He believes so profoundly in Immortality that he even runs, consciously or unconsciously, into the argument from Evolution, which, let us not forget, teaches us not only the survival of the fittest (and may we not say that a belief that has survived through all the centuries of human existence such as this firm, steadfast belief in the existence of God,

and a life beyond the grave is evidently a fit belief to survive); but it also teaches us that for every natural faculty, appetite, or instinct there is something that will answer; and so Mr. Riley insists that our hunger which goes unappeased from life's first waking to its last repose; the feeling that life is somehow unfinished, incomplete; these argue that

> "O there must be
> Some fair, green, flowery pathway endlessly
> Winding through lands Elysian! Lord, receive
> And lead each as Thine Own Child—even the Chief
> Of us who didst Immortal life achieve. . . .
> Lord, I believe:
> Help Thou mine unbelief."

He believed in the forgiveness of sin. After he had made that sad blunder of the Poe Poem hoax, and the world turned its cold shoulder upon him, and in his despair he began to dissipate, then, in repentance he wrote to an understanding friend, as recorded by Marcus Dickey:

"My steps are turning gladly toward the light, and it seems to me sometimes I almost see God's face. I have been sick—sick of the soul, for had so fierce a malady attacked the body, I would have died with all hell hugged in my arms. I can speak of this now because I can tell you I am saved."

Forgiveness does not extinguish the deeds of the past; but it does rearrange the relations between the spirit of man and our Heavenly Father, removing the barriers which sin erected between them. Riley's "The Song I Never Sing" tells the story of redeeming love that brings salvation to the sin-dimmed soul. Like a passionate evangelist he pours forth the apostrophe of the last stanza:

"O nameless lay, sing clear and strong,
  Pour down thy melody divine
Till purifying floods of song
Have washed away the stains of wrong
  That dim this soul of mine!
    O woo me near and nearer thee,
    Till my glad lips may catch the key,
    And, with a voice unwavering,
    Join in the song I never sing."

He believed in Humanity. He believed in man "As Created":

"There's a space for good to bloom in
Every heart of man or woman,—
And however wild or human,
  Or however brimmed with gall,
Never heart may beat without it;
And the darkest heart to doubt it
Has something good about it
      After all."

In 1907 Mr. Riley published a poem bearing the caption "What Title," which was a tribute to President Theodore Roosevelt, in which he asks what title best befits our first American. Then he runs over certain names: statesman, soldier, hero, chief, leader, patriot, orator, president, chief executive, but is not satisfied with any of these as the best title by which to describe the one to whom he is paying the tribute. There is something greater than any of these—and that word is MAN. There is no cheap thought of man connected with this. He recognizes each individual as sprung of Heaven's first stock; and these are the words with which the beautiful tribute ends:

> "Nay—his the simplest name—though set
> Upon him like a coronet,—
> God names our first American
> The highest, noblest name—The Man."

He was a believer in the common man. He believed in the laboring man as well as in the great president. In "A Child's Home—Long Ago," he says:

> "'Twas God's intent
> Each man should be a king—a president;
> And while through human veins the blood of pride
> Shall ebb and flow in Labor's ruling tide,

The brow of toil shall wear the diadem,
And justice gleaming there, the central gem,
Shall radiate the time when we shall see
Each man rewarded as his works shall be.
Thank God, for this bright promise! Lift the voice
Till all the waiting multitudes rejoice."

It is one of the familiar teachings of scripture that God is no respecter of persons, and Mr. Riley only restated this doctrine in the poem "To Uncle Remus," when he says:

"The Lord who made the day and night,
He made the Black man and the White;
So, in like view,
We hold it true
That He hain't got no favor*ite*."

"The Hired Man's Faith in Children" is Mr. Riley's faith also. It is a faith in humankind that is absolutely necessary in the one who would touch humankind to lift it up.

"I believe *all* childern's good,
Ef they're only *understood*,—
Even *bad* ones, 'pears to me,
'S jes' as good as they kin be!"

He believed in practical religion. There is a strange kinship between "Doc Sifers" and Christ's illustrations of religion. Christ announced His own program as one of practical service: preaching to

the poor, healing the broken-hearted, recovering sight to the blind and delivering the captives. When John's disciples came inquiring for His credentials, He simply pointed to the deeds of mercy and service that He had rendered others. So Riley speaks of lovable "Doc Sifers":

"Without a-claimin' *any creed,* Doc's rail religious views
Nobody knows—ner got no *need* o' knowin' whilse he choose
To be heerd not of man, ner raise no loud, vainglorious prayers
In crowded marts, er public ways, er—i jucks, *any*wheres!—

"'Less'n it *is* away down in his own heart, at night,
Facin' the storm, when all the town's a-sleepin' snug and tight—
Him splashin' hence from scenes o' pride and sloth and gilded show,
To some pore sufferer's bedside o' anguish, don't you know!"

Riley strikes no false note. He is a sane and wholesome optimist, guiding our dispositions away from the paths of sin. There are two kinds of sins. One, sins of the body; they are coarse, crude and vulgar; the other the sins of disposition; they are more or less "refined": selfishness, and jealousy, and egotism, and an unforgiving spirit, and grouchiness, are sins in the sight of God, nevertheless. Mr. Riley has no use for the grouch. The Savior entered into

the joys of the wedding feast, and laughter, and the music of the prodigal returned, and all the common joys of the common life; and He began his tremendous Sermon on the Mount by an eightfold repetition of the word "happy" in intensified form. And Mr. Riley, in his quaint style, gives beautiful expression to this wholesome theology in his lines "On Any Ordenary Man in a High State of Laughture and Delight," when he says:

> "As it's give' me to perceive,
> I most cert'in'y believe
> When a man's jest glad plum through,
> God's pleased with him, same as you."

He believes in the old home. In "Ike Walton's Prayer," which is a lyric of great worth, we have a man who prays not for gold and jewels, and lands and kine, but for a humble home with the light and joy of home; and for a woman who would make of their simple home a place divine, and for just a wee cot and love. He prays not for great riches or vast estates and castle halls, but for the simple things that make life really worth the living: children, sunshine, and the gentle breeze and the fragrance of blossoms, and the songs of birds, and again the wee cot. He prays not that man may tremble at his

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power of place and lordly sway, but he prays for the confidence of his neighbor; and again:

> "The wee cot, and the cricket's chirr,
> Love, and the glad sweet face of her."

Or again, you can feel a heart-throb, not a mere metrical ictus, in the lines:

> "We must get home: All is so quiet there:
> The touch of loving hands on brow and hair—
> Dim rooms, wherein the sunshine is made mild—
> The lost love of the mother and the child
> Restored in restful lullabies of rain,—
> We must get home—we must get home again!
>
> "We must get home again—we must—we must!—
> (Our rainy faces pelted in the dust)
> Creep back from the vain quest through endless strife
> To find not anywhere in all of life
> A happier happiness than blest us then. . . .
> We must get home—we must get home again!"

He believes in patriotism. His love of the old flag and his devotion to America are sublime. Let us see his self-revelation again in "Doc Sifers":

> "Yes-*sir!* Doc's got convictions and old-fashioned kind o' ways
> And idies 'bout this glorious Land o' Freedom; and he'll raise
> His hat clean off, no matter where, jes' ever' time he sees
> The Stars and Stripes a-floatin' there and flappin' in the breeze.

"And tunes like old 'Red-White-and-Blue' 'll fairly drive him
wild,
Played on the brass band, marchin' through the streets! Jes'
like a child
I've saw that man, his smile jes' set, all kind o' pale and white,
Bareheaded, and his eyes all wet, yit dancin' with delight!"

Riley has faith in nature. He loves it with an ardent love. He opens our eyes to see the wonder of things as they are. Take, for example, a couple of stanzas out of "The Poems Here at Home":

"What We want, as I sense it, in the line
O' poetry is somepin' Yours and Mine—
Somepin' with live stock in it, and out-doors,
And old crick-bottoms, snags, and sycamores:
Putt weeds in—pizen-vines, and underbresh,
As well as johnny-jump-ups, all so fresh
And sassy-like!—and groun'-squir'ls,—yes, and 'We,'
As sayin' is,—'We, Us and Company!'

"Putt in old Nature's sermonts,—them's the best,—
And 'casion'ly hang up a hornets' nest
'At boys 'at's run away from school can git
At handy-like—and let 'em tackle it!
Let us be wrought on, of a truth, to feel
Our proneness fer to hurt more than we heal,
In ministratin' to our vain delights—
Fergittin' even insec's has their rights!"

Truly, after reading Riley's poems through we give our verdict in the words which he wrote on a fly-leaf in John Boyle O'Reilly's Poems:

"I like the thrill of such poems as these,—
All spirit and fervor of splendid fact—
Pulse, and muscle, and arteries
Of living, heroic thought and act!—
Where every line is a vein of red
And rapturous blood all unconfined
As it leaps from a heart that has joyed and bled
With the rights and the wrongs of all mankind."

Riley does not have a relatively large number of poems that are on religious subjects, as such; and yet one will often come upon a line or a half-dozen lines of wondrously rich religious value, apparently dropped incidentally into the middle of some nature or narrative poem which one is perusing, as a man once found a pearl of great price in a field which he was cultivating for another purpose.

I have felt that it would be worth while to dig these pearls out and string them together—and that is what I have attempted to do in the following chapters. I have found so much of help and inspiration and joy in these literary-religious pearls that I have collected them for others. I have sought to gather them all up. Therefore, everything that Riley says about God, or Christ, or sin and its forgiveness, or immortality, or patriotism will be found in the following chapters.

If this book shall enhance Riley's popularity with religiously-inclined folk, and religion's popularity with lovers of Riley, I shall be satisfied; for, as he said of John Clark Ridpath, so we say of him:

> "Thus broadly based, his spacious faith and love
> Enfolded all below as all above—
> Nay, ev'n if overmuch he loved mankind,
> He gave his love's vast largess as designed."

CHAPTER III

"His Voice Makes Native Choice of Nature's Harmony"

THAT is what James Whitcomb Riley said of Frank L. Stanton. He said that Stanton's song was as "pure as a joyous prayer" because he sang of the fields, the open air, the orchard-bough, the mocking-bird, the blossoms, the wildwood-nook, the dewdrop, "and the kiss of the rose's lip." But when Riley spoke of Stanton he was simply describing his own chief theme. Take the first four stanzas of the poem and see how accurately they describe most of Riley's rhymes:

"He sings: and his song is heard,
Pure as a joyous prayer,
Because he sings of the simple things—
The fields, and the open air,
The orchard-bough, and the mocking-bird,
And the blossoms everywhere.

"He sings of a wealth we hold
In common ownership—
The wildwood nook, and the laugh of the brook,
And the dew-drop's drip and drip,
The love of the lily's heart of gold
And the kiss of the rose's lip.

"The universal heart
  Leans listening to his lay
That glints and gleams with the glimmering dreams
  Of children at their play—
A lay as rich with unconscious art
  As the first song-bird's of May.

"Ours every rapturous tone
  Of every song of glee,
Because his voice makes native choice
  Of Nature's harmony—
So that his singing seems our own,
  And ours his ecstasy."

What finer description of Riley's nature poetry could be written than that it is

"A lay as rich with unconscious art
  As the first song-bird's of May."

He is truly an artist here of the highest order, albeit his art is unconscious. It has been said that "the function of art is (1) to teach us *to see;* (2) to teach us *what* to see; and (3) to teach us *to see more than we see.*" Measured by this standard the poems of James Whitcomb Riley reveal the artistic temperament in all his references to the natural order.

1. HE TEACHES US TO SEE

He possessed an extraordinary power of observation. There are some men whose eyes are of no more use to other people than if they had painted

marbles in their heads. The difference between a sharpshooter and the ordinary mass of soldiers is largely a matter of keenness of observation. No one can be a real poet unless he possesses what Thomas Carlyle called "the seeing eye." It is this which reveals the inner harmony of things, and makes known the musical idea which nature has dressed up in these often rough habiliments. To Carlyle's requirement we might add that the poet must possess also the hearing ear, so that when in meekness and love he lays his head upon the mother-breast of nature he will be able to interpret the musical soft beatings of her bounteous heart. Riley possessed both. He was on these intimate terms with nature. In "A Poor Man's Wealth" he revels in his opulence of poverty for

> "When I ride not—with you—I walk
> In Nature's company, and talk
> With one who will not slight or slur
> The child forever dear to her—
> And one who answers back, be sure,
> With smile for smile, though I am poor."

In our florid American way we have given many nicknames to this national bard of ours; but one that seems to fit him peculiarly well is "The Bobby

Burns of America." Burns sang his sweetest songs of the simple, commonplace things that he daily saw and felt, as the lark of his native Scotland goes singing its way into the sky, its breast still wet with the dews of earth. Even so is Riley able to see the divine nimbus that hangs over the commonplace things of life. Go through his "Time of Clearer Twitterings" and note the glory with which he surrounds the shellbark hickory, or sycamore, or hazel thicket, or pennyroyal or mint! Take the last stanza and read it through and you feel that black-haws and May-apples are as fit subjects for the poet as is "the nectar that Jupiter sips," thus:

"Ah! will any minstrel say,
In his sweetest roundelay,
What is sweeter, after all,
Than black-haws, in early Fall?
Fruit so sweet the frost first sat,
Dainty-toothed, and nibbled at!
And will any poet sing
Of a lusher, richer thing
Than a ripe May-apple, rolled
Like a pulpy lump of gold
Under thumb and finger-tips,
And poured molten through the lips?
Go, ye bards of classic themes,
Pipe your songs by classic streams!
I would twang the redbird's wings
In the thicket while he sings!"

While others would journey to romantic, historic and classic haunts to find some poetic nugget, Riley dug the gold of poetry out of the soil of his native Indiana. Nothing that nature made was considered unworthy of his notice. It is simply astonishing how many of the common things of life he mentions—and how frequently he refers to them. I have gone through his *Complete Works* with considerable care, and have marked and counted the natural objects that he mentions in his poems. I suppose that I have missed some; but my findings are as follows:

He mentions by name thirty-five different flowers. The rose heads the list, appearing at least ninety-five times. The lily comes second, forty-three times. Then follow the pink, the water-lily, the honeysuckle, the morning-glory, the hollyhock, the primrose, wild-rose, buttercup, tiger-lily, peony, violet, elder-blossom, forget-me-not, sweet-william, sweet-pea, lilac, marigold, daisy, sunflower, aster, phlox, pansy, mignonette, poppy, daffodil, etc. He loves especially the old flowers. He makes the farmer's wife who has grown rich and moved to town express herself in this manner:

"What's in all this grand life and high situation,
And nary pink nor hollyhawk a-bloomin' at the door?—
Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's Station—
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!"

Once when he was confined to his bed by sickness, his friend, Eugene V. Debs, brought him a bouquet of roses. Then Riley wrote a dialect poem about "Them Flowers," the closing lines of which are:

"You see, it's like this, what his weaknesses is,—
Them flowers makes him think of the days
Of his innocent youth, and that mother o' his,
And the roses that *she* us't to raise;—
So here, all alone with the roses you send—
Bein' sick and all trimbly and faint,—
My eyes is—my eyes is—my eyes is—old friend—
Is a-leakin'—I'm blamed ef they ain't!"

Our poet mentions by name forty-three different kinds of trees. The apple tree heads the list, being spoken of thirty-seven times—twenty-six times the reference is general—five times the Rambo is specified, four times the Pippin, once the Prince Harvest and once the White Peruvian. The elm and sycamore are each mentioned fourteen times; the locust, maple and buckeye each thirteen times; the cherry, peach and oak each eleven times; the pear and hazel

each ten times; the beech nine times; we find the plum, quince, haw, cedar, dogwood, mulberry, butternut, walnut, hickory, poplar, sassafras and so on, at least forty-three different kinds of trees embalmed in his poems.

Likewise he sees the grain, the common grain of our fields—and he sings of it. Corn appears, by my count, thirty-one times in his poetry; wheat, thirteen times; barley, three times; rye, oats, cotton and popcorn each twice; sorghum, sugar-cane, buckwheat and sweet-corn each once. The wild joy he felt in living close to these grains of the field is expressed in that best known of all his lyrics:

"When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock,"

or in his reminiscent "Song of Yesterday":

"And, cool and sweet,
My naked feet
Found dewy pathways through the wheat;
And out again
Where, down the lane,
The dust was dimpled with the rain."

If Moses saw, in the back part of the desert, a bush aflame with the divine significance, so Riley would teach us to see the Awful Imminence in the

flaming bloom of clover or goldenrod or ironweed. He speaks of thirty-five different kinds of grass and weeds. Just ordinary unnamed weeds appear seventeen times. Grass is mentioned seventy-eight times; clover and vines, each twenty-eight; moss, thirteen; thistle and reed, each nine times; grape-vine, eight; brier, seven; pennyroyal and peppermint, four times each; ivy poison vine, calamus, fern, cattail, rush, three times each; dog-fennel, jimson-weed, ragweed, horseradish, dandelion, ironweed and pokeberry, twice each; ginseng, wintergreen, boneset, sheepsour, nettle, mullein, dock-greens, toadstool, pimpernel, each at least once. It was difficult for Riley to write without thinking of the grasses and the blossoms: thus even in "Little Girly-Girl" her blue eyes and glimmering tresses were

> "Like glad waters running over
> Shelving shallows, rimmed with clover,"

and the waving grass becomes billows of beauty and the blossoms but the flecks of foam where the billows break:

> "And the meadow's grassy billows
> Break in blossoms round the willows
> Where the currents curve and curl."

Riley teaches us to see nearly all of our common

fruits and vegetables as being not unworthy of poetic treatment. I find the apple (this is specifically the fruit in addition to the tree referred to above) mentioned at least thirty-five times; sixteen times the variety is not designated; eight times the Pippin is singled out; three times the Prince Harvest; twice the Rambo; twice the Russet; once each the Winesap, the Siberian Crab, the Rhode Island Greening and the Bellflower. Sometimes he makes our mouths water with descriptions of the delicious eating qualities of the apple, and sometimes, as in "A Song of Long Ago," he asks us just to

"Let the eyes of fancy turn
Where the tumbled Pippins burn
Like embers in the orchard's lap of tangled grass and fern."

That is exactly what they are like, though we never thought of it until he told us, did we?

The peach (sometimes the "Clingstone," sometimes the "Freestone" and sometimes just the peach) is mentioned eleven times. The grape comes in seventeen times; the pear, fifteen times, Bartlett pear once and Sugar pear once; all sorts of fruits and vegetables are glorified by our poet: cherries, plums, berries, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, pumpkin, gourd, lettuce, turnips, rhubarb,

parsnips, beans, cabbage, beets, watermelons—fifteen times: oh, he knows all about "Wortermelon Time":

"Oh! it's in the sandy soil wortermelons does the best,
And it's thare they'll lay and waller in the sunshine and the dew
Tel they wear all the green streaks clean off of theyr breast;
And you bet I ain't a-findin' any fault with them; air you?"

And so on to the end: he can tell you the names of the different varieties, and the best ones, and that you must not plant them too near pumpkins, and so on: there is nothing about watermelons which he does not know. And this same wonderful power of observation and meticulous knowledge is seen in all the things of nature of which he writes. He speaks in "Old Heck's Idolatry" of the pear; but it is more than that, it is a

"Tawny, mellow pear, whose golden ore
Fell molten on the tongue and oozed away
In creamy and delicious nothingness."

Or the muskmelon is a

"Netted melon, musky as the breath
Of breezes blown from the Orient."

Or we see the bloom on grape or plum and pass it by unseen until Riley shows us:

"And purple clusterings of plum and grape,
Blurred with a dust dissolving at the touch
Like flakes the fairies had snowed over them."

The wild fruits he knows as well as the tame—and probably better. They all enter the temple of his poetry for their glorification: hickory nuts, walnuts, beechnuts, May-apples, wild-strawberries, wild-plums, pawpaws: as a sample of the sheer, unadulterated delight that he found in nature, as well as a sample of wildly imaginative yet wholly accurate description, take this delicious stanza out of "Up and Down Old Brandywine":

"And sich pop-paws!—Lumps o' raw
Gold and green,—jes' oozy th'ough
With ripe yaller—like you've saw
Custard-pie with no crust to:
And jes' *gorges* o' wild plums,
Till a feller'd suck his thumbs
Clean up to his elbows! *My!—*
Me some more er lem me die!"

The barnyard fowls also are in his poetry, and all kinds of animals, both domestic and wild. I find the chicken mentioned thirty-eight times, the duck and the goose each five times, the turkey and the guinea each four times, and the peafowl once. Among animals, the dog heads the list, appearing at least one hundred and thirty-seven times; and then

the horse sixty-six times; the bear sixty times; the cow forty-two times; the coon twenty-two times; the wolf twenty-one times; the hog nineteen times; the sheep thirteen times, and so on: the cat, the panther, the mule, chipmunk, deer, otter, muskrat, weasel, squirrel, fox, possum, rabbit—all kinds of animals. And someway or other when we look at these animals through Riley's eyes they no longer seem common or unclean. Take "The Hoss":

> "The hoss he is a splendud beast;
> He is man's friend, as heaven desined,
> And, search the world from west to east,
> No honester you'll ever find!"

Or take the dog: how much of human nature he expresses, and how faithful portrayal of human affection for a dog he gives us in "When Old Jack Died," the first stanza of which is:

> "When Old Jack died, we stayed from school (they said,
> At home we needn't go that day), and none
> Of us ate any breakfast—only one,
> And that was Papa—and his eyes were red
> When he came round where we were, by the shed
> Where Jack was lying, half-way in the sun
> And half-way in the shade. When we begun
> To cry out loud, Pa turned and dropped his head

And went away; and Mamma, she went back
Into the kitchen. Then, for a long while,
All to ourselves, like, we stood there and cried.
We thought so many good things of Old Jack,
And funny things—although we didn't smile—
We couldn't only cry when Old Jack died."

Our beloved Nature Poet had such wonderful powers of observation that he seemed to hear and see everything. All his faculties were keenly alive. Nature is a page written all over with large and small letters. It is interlined and cross-lined and has many marginal notes. There are many different readers of this interesting page. Some people look at it and see only the headings in large type. Others read much of the story, but never see the interlining or cross-lining or marginal notes. Most anybody will see a horse, but only the few will note that

"The hoss-fly is a whettin'-up his forelegs fer biz,
And the off-mare is a-switchin' all of her tale they is."

Most anybody will see the swan that floats majestically upon the water, but only the close observer will note what the bumblebees and water-bugs are doing as does Riley in "The Brook-Song":

"Sing about a bumblebee
That tumbled from a lily-bell and grumbled mumblingly,
Because he wet the film
Of his wings, and had to swim,
While the water-bugs raced round and laughed at him!"

Most anybody pities a man in pain, but how many

> "Pity as much as a man in pain
> The writhing honey-bee wet with rain,"

as does Riley in "Away"? Really, his mind was like a photographer's sensitized plate, everything in focus was caught and individualized instantly.

We need not be surprised, therefore, to find him mentioning (according to my count) twenty-two different insects. The honey-bee holds the highest place, appearing seventy-four times; the cricket, katydid and firefly each twenty-three times; the bumblebee nineteen times; the dragonfly thirteen times; the locust twelve times; the butterfly nine times, and so on down the list: bug, grasshopper, flea, hornet, glow-worm, fly, horse-fly, mosquito, spider, wasp, yellow-jacket, caterpillar, June bug. His "Two Sonnets to the June-Bug," while excruciatingly funny, is sufficient evidence that he knew the characteristics of these little creatures. In the first sonnet he describes the "eternal buzzin' serenade" that is kept up by the June bug, and in the second sonnet declares:

> "And I've got up and lit the lamp, and clum
> On cheers and trunks and wash-stands and bureaus,
> And all such dangerous articles as those,
> And biffed at you with brooms, and never come

In two feet of you,—maybe skeered you some,—
But what does that amount to when it throws
A feller out o' balance, and his nose
Gits barked ag'inst the mantel, while you hum
Fer joy around the room, and churn your head
Ag'inst the ceilin', and draw back and butt
The plasterin' loose, and drop—behind the bed,
Where never human-bein' ever putt
Harm's hand on you, or ever truthful said
He'd choke your dern infernal wizzen shut!"

He is acquainted with fish, too, is Riley, and counts them worthy of a place in his poems. They are found there at least forty times—not only fish in general, but in particular there are pike, catfish, bass, sunfish, codfish, sculpin, minnow, sucker, trout, bream and perch. He even calls them by their familiar names, as "Chub," "silver-side," "goggle-eye," and so forth.

The turtle, the terrapin, the snail, the fishing worm, the frog, the toad, the tree-toad, the snake—with all of these he is well acquainted, and treats them with poetic grace.

But it is when he gets among the birds that he throws off all restraint and wallows in bliss. His powers of observation are as keen as those of the birds themselves. In "Knee-Deep in June," he says:

"Ketch a shadder down below,
And look up to find the crow—
Er a hawk,—away up there,
'Pearantly *froze* in the air!—
Hear the old hen squawk, and squat
Over ever' chick she's got,
Suddent-like!—and she knows where
That-air hawk is, well as you!—
You jes' bet your life she do!—
Eyes a-glitterin' like glass,
Waitin' till he makes a pass!"

The birds see quickly everything that is going on around them; so does our poet; but with this difference: their vision is sharpened by fear, his vision is sharpened by love. He sees the birds and he knows them by name. How did he ever get to know all of these feathered songsters, to know their plumage and their habits as well as a professional ornithologist? He did not know that somebody would go through his poems to count how many birds are there, and yet they all come flocking into his rhymes as naturally as they come into our orchards and meadows at the return of summer. I find forty-seven distinct kinds of birds in his poems. The robin is mentioned most frequently, thirty-five times; the bluebird, twenty-eight; the dove, twenty-one; the quail (sometimes called "Old Bob White")

and the whippoorwill are each mentioned eighteen times; the swallow appears twelve times; the redbird, the lark and the humming-bird each ten times; the nightingale, hawk and thrush each nine times; the killdeer and the bluejay each eight times; the bat and the red-headed woodpecker (sometimes called "sapsuck") each seven times; and so on through the list, we find the wren, seagull, eagle, blackbird, catbird, buzzard, crane, crow, owl, chickadee (sometimes called the "titmouse" or the "tomtit"), sparrow (or "chipbird"), mocking bird, canary, bee-bird, peewee, bittern, vulture, pelican, kite, kingfisher, loon, snowbird, chewink, snipe, yellowbill, flicker (or "yellow hammer"), yellow-bird, martin, raven, bobolink, pigeon.

Riley does not only name the birds; but he *knows* them. As an example of his meticulous observation of them and of his accurate description of them, take the jay. A scientist (in *Webster's New International Dictionary)* describes it as follows:

"The jays are smaller and more aboreal than the crows, more gracefully formed, more highly colored (blue often predominating), and many species have a long tail and large erectile crest. They have roving habits, harsh voices, pugnacious dispositions, and

are noted for destroying the nests, eggs and young of weaker birds."

Now compare with that scientific description Riley's description. In "Knee-Deep in June," he merely touches the subject, in this manner:

"Mr. Bluejay, full o' sass,
In them baseball clothes o' his,
Sportin' round the orchard jes'
Like he owned the premises!"

But he draws the portrait at fuller length in child dialect in "The Jaybird," as follows:

"The Jaybird he's my favor*ite*
Of all the birds they is!
I think he's quite a stylish sight
In that blue suit of his:
An' when he 'lights an' shuts his wings,
His coat's a "cutaway"—
I guess it's only when he sings
You'd know he was a jay.

"I like to watch him when he's lit
In top of any tree,
'Cause all the birds git wite out of it
When *he* 'lights, an' they see
How proud he act', an' swell an' spread
His chest out more an' more,
An' raise the feathers on his head
Like it's cut pompadore!"

Now, this is the question that obtrudes itself upon us: How could any man see so well all things in nature, and then set down so faithfully what he saw? How did he happen to notice, as in "A Brave Refrain," on that winter morning that

> "The knuckled twigs are gloved with frost"?

Or how did he happen to notice in that "Vision of Summer" the

> ". . . lush glooms of the thicket"?

Or how did he happen to become so well acquainted with "The Bat," as to tell all about it in two lines:

> "Thou dread, uncanny thing,
> With fuzzy breast and leathern wing"?

What was it so sharpened his powers of observation as to make him sensitive to colors in nature

> "From rainbow tints, to pure white snow,"

as he puts it in "To a Boy Whistling"? What was it made him so intimate with midsummer as to hail it as "An Old Friend" that brings its harvest store of olden joys, "odorous breaths of clover hay," the doves, and

> "Vast overhanging meadow-lands of rain,
> And drowsy dawns, and noons when golden grain
> Nods in the sun"?

Why in his appeal to "Babyhood" did he yearn to

> "Turn to the brook where the honeysuckle tipping
> O'er its vase of perfume spills it on the breeze,
> And the bee and humming-bird in ecstasy are sipping
> From the fairy flagons of the blooming locust trees"?

How had he come to observe both the dragonfly and blossoms so carefully as to remark casually in "Pan" the dragonfly was

> "Like a wind-born blossom blown about?"

Or what was it prompted him to watch a primrose blossoming out so that when he wanted to tell of "Armazindy's" transformation from a child to a woman, he likened her to the primrose:

> "Jevver watch a primrose 'bout
> Minute 'fore it blossoms out—
> Kind o' loosen-like, and blow
> Up its muscles, don't you know,
> And, all suddent, bu'st and bloom
> Out life-size?"

What is the answer to all these questions? There is only one answer, and that is Riley's true love of nature. He was not a cold-blooded specialist peeping into nature's closets. He was a lover who lived close to nature's heart, who looked lovingly and steadily at nature, observing the individual features

of bird and bee, of field and flower. He joyed in seeing

> "Nothin' but green woods and clear
> Skies and unwrit poetry
> By the acre!"

as he put it in "A Pen-Pictur' of a Cert'in Frivvolus Old Man." His ear detected the most furtive sounds. He listened even when he could

> "Hear nothin' but the *silunce.*"

His nose detected the most fugitive odors—all because he was a lover of nature. Love sharpens the vision and the hearing; enlivens the feet; steadies the hand. It is as important to enjoy as it is to understand. Riley absorbed as well as investigated. His poems have a strong flavor of the rank, rich soil from which they sprang.

It is out of this sympathetic and emotional enjoyment of nature that the lyric is born. The one capable of it feels that the

> "Unwrit poetry by the acre"

is all his. His joy, wonder, worship, surge to expression. He perceives everywhere a harmony which is beauty, and he bodies it forth in material

form through the medium of words, fashioning it according to his own mood. This pageantry of color and form and sound and stir that he notes everywhere in earth and sky and air floods his whole being with emotion and bids him sing in accordant rhythm, and so he sings "A Song":

"There is ever a song somewhere, my dear;
There is ever a something sings alway;
There's the song of the lark when the skies are clear,
And the song of the thrush when the skies are gray.
The sunshine showers across the grain,
And the bluebird trills in the orchard tree;
And in and out, when the eaves drip rain,
The swallows are twittering ceaselessly.

"There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
Be the skies above or dark or fair,
There is ever a song that our hearts may hear—
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear—
There is ever a song somewhere."

This is the very spirit of poetry. The note of lark or bluebird or swallow gives the key. The song that is ever somewhere is etherealized into rarer music by the poet's transfiguring and interpreting temperament. It is emotion that gives birth to the lyric poem. One April day in 1891, Mr. Riley wrote "The First Bluebird." Though it is in the Hoosier dialect and pretends to be a "Benj. F. Johnson of

Boone" poem, yet it is just what all lovers of nature have felt (and been unable to express) after a winter of "rain and snow! and rain again." Thus:

"This morning I was 'most afeard
To *wake* up—when, I jing!
I seen the sun shine out and heerd
The first bluebird of Spring!—
Mother she'd raised the winder some;—
And in acrost the orchard come,
Soft as a' angel's wing,
A breezy, treesy, beesy hum,
Too sweet for anything!

"The winter's shroud was rent apart—
The sun bu'st forth in glee,—
And when *that bluebird* sung, my hart
Hopped out o' bed with me!"

Go through "A Hoosier Calendar" which Riley wrote, having a stanza for each month, and see the poet's full outpouring of himself. He does not care so much for the first three months, but in April he begins to get "inspiration," and then May:

"And May! It's warmin' jest to see
The crick thawed clear ag'in and dancin'—
'Pears-like it's tickled 'most as *me*
A-prancin' 'crosst it with my pants on!
And then to hear the bluebird whet
His old song up and lance it through you,
Clean through the boy's heart beatin' yet—
Hallylooya!"

But it is by no means only in "A Hoosier Calendar" that we find the full outpouring of our bard's self in lyric poems. He revels in "The Laughter of the Rain":

> "The rain sounds like a laugh to me—
> A low laugh poured out limpidly."

He was profoundly sensitive to the beauty of the world. He loved nature for her own sake, and because she ministered to his love of what was fair and good to look upon. With perfect abandon he sings "The Brook-Song":

> "Little brook! Little brook!
> You have such a happy look—
> Such a very merry manner, as you swerve and curve
> and crook—
> As your ripples, one and one,
> Reach each other's hands and run
> Like laughing little children in the sun!"

To my mind, the best example of Riley's nature poetry is "The South Wind and the Sun." He always had a particular affection for this poem. It is longer than most of his lyrics, containing twenty stanzas of eight lines each—and it should all be read and re-read *aloud* for one to be borne along on the swelling current of its warm and colored image, and

to eddy in its surgent, glowing words. Take, for example, two stanzas—the first one and another picked at randon from the middle of the poem:

"O the South Wind and the Sun!
How each loved the other one—
Full of fancy—full of folly—
Full of jollity and fun!
How they romped and ran about,
Like two boys when school is out,
With glowing face, and lisping lip,
Low laugh, and lifted shout!

"Over meadow-lands they tripped,
Where the dandelions dipped
In crimson foam of clover-bloom,
And dripped and dripped and dripped;
And they clinched the bumble-stings,
Gauming honey on their wings,
And bundling them in lily-bells,
With maudlin murmurings."

The month of June always set Riley going. One of his earliest poems he entitled "June," in which he declared that he nestled like a drowsy child and dozed in June's

". . . downy lap of clover-bloom;"

and he heard the lily blow

"A bugle-call of fragrance o'er the glade."

Better known than Lowell's "What is so rare as a

day in June?" is Riley's "Knee-Deep in June." It seems as though everybody knows it—or ought to. It closes with words that hold forever, as an aroma, the evanescent mood of the nature-lover:

"But when *June* comes—Clear my th'oat
With wild honey!—Rench my hair
In the dew! and hold my coat!
Whoop out loud! and th'ow my hat!—
June wants me, and I'm to spare!
Spread them shadders anywhere,
I'll git down and waller there,
And obleeged to you at that!"

But our poet uses the lyrical form also as the means of expression for his ripest wisdom and most burdened thought. Sometimes it is a welling song and sometimes a cry; but it is still the lyric. He meets and masters every mood. He transmutes his private griefs as well as his private joys into the great passionate streams of universal suffering within reach of all men. Read through (and weep while you read) the lines he wrote "On the Death of Little Mahala Ashcraft," the opening stanza of which is:

"'Little Haly! Little Haly!' cheeps the robin in the tree;
'Little Haly!' sighs the clover, 'Little Haly!' moans the bee;
'Little Haly! Little Haly!' calls the killdeer at twilight;
And the katydids and crickets hollers 'Haly!' all the night."

Riley is in deep sympathy with all of nature's moods, and he feels that nature is in sympathy with him. Therefore, the robin and the bluebird can sing in sadder notes when he is sad, and though sometimes the rain is like "low laughter," yet when he weeps it is like "wild gusts of tears." Thus when "Little Marjorie," the four-year-old daughter of his friend, William C. Bobbs, died, he wrote an appealing poem, the first two stanzas of which are:

"'Where is little Marjorie?'
There's the robin in the tree,
With his gallant call once more
From the boughs above the door!
There's the bluebird's note, and there
Are spring-voices everywhere
Calling, calling ceaselessly—
'Where is little Marjorie?'

"And her old playmate, the rain,
Calling at the window-pane
In soft syllables that win
Not her answer from within—
'Where is little Marjorie?'
Or is it the rain, ah me!
Or wild gusts of tears that were
Calling us—not calling her!"

We get the same feeling of our brooding Poet's mystic sympathy with nature that not only enables him to understand nature's secrets, but also makes

nature meet his every mood. We are thinking just now of how no mood is denied the lyric. "Our Little Girl" is an illustration of its characteristic note of intense personality. Sorrow, regret, tears, sob all the way through it. The Poet transmutes his private griefs into the great passionate universal yearning: "We want our little girl again":

"And yet the way before us—
O how empty now and drear!—
How e'en the dews of roses
Seem as dripping tears for her!
And the song-birds all seem crying,
As the winds cry and the rain,
All sobbingly,—'We want—we want
Our little girl again!'"

2. HE TEACHES US WHAT TO SEE

The function of art is not only "to teach us to see," but also "to teach us what to see." Measured by this standard, James Whitcomb Riley's nature poetry is not found wanting. He is not only a careful observer, seeing and hearing everything because he loves nature; but he possesses powers of description that are nothing short of marvelous. Who that has ever done that most delightful work of plowing a loamy sod-field on a spring day does not thank Riley for his whimsical descriptions in "Mis-

ter Hop-Toad." We followed the plow across the field; but we failed to see what we might have seen. Take the first stanza as a sample:

"Howdy, Mister Hop-Toad! Glad to see you out!
Bin a month o' Sund'ys sense I seen you hereabout.
Kind o' bin a-layin' in, from the frost and snow?
Good to see you out ag'in, it's bin so long ago!
Plows like slicin' cheese, and sod's loppin' over even;
Loam's like gingerbread, and clods's softer'n deceivin'—
Mister Hop-Toad, honest-true—Spring-time—don't you love it?
You old rusty rascal you, at the bottom of it!"

That is just right: it "plows like slicin' cheese"; the "loam is like gingerbread." Why, of course! We have seen that kind of plowing many a time; but we never had the fun of making that figure of speech. Every farmer should thank Riley for taking the drudgery out of farm work; for calling attention to the inconspicuous beauties which the prosaic toilsomeness of country life has too often failed to perceive. His "Thoughts fer the Discuraged Farmer" are good for all of us, no matter what our occupation. If we read it aloud on a summer morning we are bound to go singing to our work, whether that work be in harvest field or mill or mine or store or office or bank. What glowing imagery! The summer wind smelling the sweet fragrance of

the locust blossoms; the bees "swigging" honey until they stutter in their buzzing or stagger in their flying; the flicker rolling up its feathers for joyous work as a farmer rolls up his sleeves! Thank you, Riley, for opening our eyes to see the wonders of a June morning!

"The summer winds is sniffin' round the bloomin' locus' trees;
And the clover in the pastur is a big day fer the bees,
And they been a-swiggin' honey, above board and on the sly,
Tel they stutter in theyr buzzin' and stagger as they fly.
The flicker on the fence-rail 'pears to jest spit on his wings
And roll up his feathers, by the sassy way he sings;
And the hoss-fly is a-whettin'-up his forelegs fer biz,
And the off-mare is a-switchin' all of her tale they is."

And so he goes on through four more stanzas opening before our wondering vision the amazing delights of a summer morning, ending with the unforgettable lines:

"Fer the world is full of roses, and the roses full of dew,
And the dew is full of heavenly love that drips fer me and you."

One summer when Riley was only twenty-five years of age, he was visiting friends for a week at an old-fashioned homestead on the banks of Lick Creek. One day he went out and spent a few hours with some thrashers, and then returned across fields

to the homestead three miles away. At one point he followed what he called "a darling pathway," overhung with willow boughs. He forthwith wrote twenty-six stanzas to describe the delights of "A Country Pathway." Before going for a walk in the country again, read this graceful poem through, and you will see things you never saw before. For instance, when you come to a meadow you will see the clover stalks nodding in the breeze; but more than that, you will see them shake rosy fists at you as though they resented the intrusion, and, protesting, they will threaten to drive you out, as though the bumblebees buzzing around the clover were their watch-dogs. He is following the Pathway:

> "In pranks of hide-and-seek, as on ahead
> I see it running, while the clover-stalks
> Shake rosy fists at me, as though they said—
> 'You dog our country walks
>
> "'And mutilate us with your walking-stick!—
> We will not suffer tamely what you do,
> And warn you at your peril,—for we will sick
> Our bumblebees on you!'"

The farmer who goes out to husk his corn on an autumn morning, "When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock," knows after reading

Riley (though he may not have known it before) that:

". . . the air's so appetizin'; and the landscape through the haze
Of a crisp and sunny morning of the airly autumn days
Is a pictur' that no painter has the colorin' to mock—
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock."

The Hoosier bard has done us all a rare service in stimulating our eyes to see, and our ears to hear, in all the little commonplaces about us, those endlessly changing details which make life everywhere so unfathomably, immeasurably wondrous. In his "Life at the Lake" we behold nature as truly a miracle, getting that inspiration which miracles always breathe into the spirit of mankind. We behold:

"The green below and the blue above!—
The waves caressing the shores they love."

We hear

"The leaf-hid locust whet his wings,"—

and we are glad to be told what the locust is doing when he makes that peculiar noise; we never knew before; but now it does sound like the farmer whetting his scythe. Vividness distinguishes the descriptive passages of all of Riley's nature poetry. He sets his scenes in vividly real background—so faith-

ful to actual nature that the local sentiment aroused as you read his poems may generally be accepted as true. Take a bit of description out of the center of his long poem, "Old Hec's Idolatry"—his "Knights" suddenly came

> "Upon an open road that circled round
> A reedy flat and sodden tract of sedge,
> Moated with stagnant water, crusted thick
> With slimy moss, wherein were wriggling things
> Entangled, and blind bubbles bulging up
> And bursting where from middle way upshot
> A tree-trunk, with its gnarled and warty hands
> As tho' upheld to clutch at gliding snakes
> Or nip the wet wings of the dragon-fly."

Mr. Riley's greatest nature descriptions have to do with the summer-time. Even in the winter he can make us *see* summer. If you doubt this read "The Muskingum Valley," a poem which he composed while riding up the Muskingum Valley, in Ohio, all day in an old hack on a bitterly cold day in March, to fill a lecture engagement at McConnellsville. He says: "During the journey the cold was so trying that in reaction and for diversion I busied myself picturing the summer-time in the valley and the beauty of it." He succeeded so well that, reading it anywhere, anytime of year, we can see the

blossoms and the soft-sloping hills and the river as restful as "an old fiddle-tune." We quote the first stanza as a sample:

"The Muskingum Valley!—How longin' the gaze
A feller throws back on its long summer days,
When the smiles of its blossoms and *my* smiles wuz one-
And-the-same, from the rise to the set of the sun:
Wher' the hills sloped as soft as the dawn down to noon,
And the river run by like an old fiddle-tune,
And the hours glided past as the bubbles 'ud glide,
All so loaferin'-like, 'long the path o' the tide."

Some of us never really saw "A Summer Sunrise" until we read Riley's beautiful poem with that title. Take a few lines picked at random:

"And mountains, peering in the skies,
Stand ankle-deep in lakes of gold."

What a vivid description suggesting the mountains standing there in the morning sunlight, "ankle-deep in lakes of gold," and "peering in the skies." We have often seen mountains do just that thing, but we did not know that was what they were doing until Riley taught us to see.

"And spangled with the shine and shade,
I see the rivers raveled out
In strands of silver, slowly fade
In threads of light along the glade
Where truant roses hide and pout."

That is a true scene in God's open country on a summer morning: the gleaming rivers across the landscape are "raveled out in strands of silver";

> "But as I gaze, the city's walls
> Are keenly smitten with a gleam
> Of pallid splendor, that appalls
> The fancy as the ruin falls
> In ashen embers of a dream."

Riley always excelled in his descriptions of the coming of dusk. In his "August," after faithfully picturing "a day of torpor in the sullen heat of Summer's passion," he represents Day, in the closing lines, as going to sleep in the arms of Night:

> "Till, throbbing on and on, the pulse of heat
> Increases—reaches—passes fever's height,
> And Day sinks into slumber, cool and sweet,
> Within the arms of Night."

We have all gazed in rapture at the first star shining in the sky at even time, and sometimes in childish inquisitiveness wonder how it got there; but in his "Dusk Song" our poet makes us see it as vividly as we have seen boys wading in a river:

> "One naked star has waded through
> The purple shallows of the night."

For exalted description and the creation of the concomitant of emotional tone, I know nothing that

surpasses his account of "Dusk" in "Dead Leaves." The first sentence must suffice here:

> "The frightened herds of clouds across the sky
> Trample the sunshine down, and chase the day
> Into the dusky lands of gray
> And somber twilight."

Not unlike the foregoing are some lines found in "Thanksgiving Day at Hunchley's," where he pictures mystic voices and sounds of terror bred of nature's laws:

"I have leaned upon Niagara, and heard the wailing tide
Where it leaps its awful chasm in unending suicide:

"I have heard the trampling footsteps of the roaring hurricane
As he lashed his tail of lightning, and tossed his shaggy mane;
I have heard the cannonading of the devastating storm."

Riley possessed to a more marked degree than any other American writer the art of describing natural objects and presenting ideas in symphonies and harmonies of tone. Almost any one of his nature poems will illustrate this fact. Read aloud, for instance, two or three stanzas from "The Shower," and see how they impress you:

> "The landscape, like the awed face of a child
> Grew curiously blurred; a hush of death
> Fell on the fields, and in the darkened wild
> The zephyr held its breath.

"The sullen day grew darker, and anon
Dim flashes of pent anger lit the sky;
With rumbling wheels of wrath came rolling on
The storm's artillery.

"The cloud above put on its blackest frown,
And then, as with a vengeful cry of pain,
The lightning snatched it, ripped and flung it down
In raveled shreds of rain."

3. HE TEACHES US TO SEE MORE THAN WE SEE

It is a further function of art to "teach us to see more than we see." Riley does it. In his hands the natural becomes a translucent veil through which the spiritual pours its light and inspiration into the hearts of men. The last poem from which we have quoted, "The Shower," was one of his earlier poems, written in April, 1879. It put him in the very van of lyric poets; but more than that, the final stanza of it stamps him as a true artist in the sense of the highest "function of art," which we are now considering:

"While I, transfigured by some wondrous art,
Bowed with the thirsty lilies to the sod,
My empty soul brimmed over, and my heart
Drenched with the love of God."

Read his works carefully and you will be amazed

at how often he likens natural objects to psychological phenomena, as in "Dawn, Noon and Dewfall":

"Trompin' home acrost the fields: Lightnin'-bugs a-blinkin'
In the wheat like sparks o' things feller keeps a-thinkin';"

or as in "The Speeding of the King's Spite":

"The girl had grown, in the mother's care
Like a bud in the shine and shower
That drinks of the wine of the balmy air
Till it blooms in matchless flower;"

or as in "Squire Hawkins's Story":

"Now *love's* as cunnin' a little thing
As a hummin'-bird upon the wing";

or as in "The Funny Little Fellow," who had "a heart as mellow as an apple over-ripe," and

"His smile was like the glitter
Of the sun in tropic lands
And his talk a sweeter twitter
Than the swallow understands;"

or as when he wants to tell of the mental as well as physical effect that the touch of "Dear Hands" has upon him, he declares that the touches of her hands are light as "the fall of velvet snow-flakes,"

or "the down of the peach," or the "flossy fondlings of the thistle-wisp caught in the crinkle" of a brown leaf, or as "the falling of the dusk at night," or as "the dew that falls so softly down no one ever knew the touch thereof save lovers"; or as in "Limitations of Genius," he makes us see the agitated whiteness of a pale woman's face when she becomes animated, as:

> "Her pale face lit
> Like winter snow with sunrise over it";

or as when he wants to refer to that strange psychological phenomenon, that sudden clustering of a crowd of boys upon the slightest excitement in any community,

> "Like a clot of bees round an apple-core";

or as in "The Harper" where he desires to describe the spiritual effect that the skilful playing of a harp has upon him, he likens the strings to slanting rain and the player's fingers to a drift of faded blossoms:

> "Like a drift of faded blossoms
> Caught in a slanting rain,
> His fingers glimpsed down the strings of his harp
> In a tremulous refrain";

and he knows of no better way to describe the exquisite music than to call it "rainy sweet":

"Patter and tinkle and drip and drip!
Ah! but the chords were rainy sweet!
And I closed my eyes and I bit my lip,
As he played there in the street."

He closed his eyes and bit his lip because it made him think of the little bed in the corner of the garret with the rafters and the little window and

"The rain above, and a mother's love,
And God's companionship!"

or as in "Armazindy" he compares a bad woman to a snake: oh, how his description of her stings and burns—and suits:

"But she wuz a cunnin', sly,
Meek and lowly sort o' lie,
'At men-folks like me and you
B'lieves jes' 'cause we ortn't to.—
Jes' as purty as a snake,
And as *pizen*—mercy sake!"

or as in "To My Old Friend, William Leachman," where the soul's sorrow is compared to an icy winter, and a sympathizing friend to the sun that thaws it out and brings summer to the soul:

"And the clock, like ice a-crackin', clickt the icy hours in two—
And my eyes'd never thawed out ef it hadn't been fer you!"

Truly, Riley was so much of an artist that all nature seemed like an art-gallery to him, full of lovely pictures. He became the People's Poet because he kept close to nature as a source of inspiration furnishing him an infinite variety of images and fancies. He was not given to "preaching," and yet he beheld nature as a great book of parables which he joyed to interpret for us. He beholds "Autumn" as a harvester, swart and hale, faring homeward with slow stride,

> "Weary both in arm and limb,
> Yet the wholesome heart of him
> Sheer at rest and satisfied."

In that graceful poem, "A Country Pathway," he speaks of coming, in his wanderings, to a place where the perfect day bursts into bloom,

> "And crowns a long, declining stretch of space,
> Where King Corn's armies lie with flags unfurled,
> And where the valley's dint in Nature's face
> Dimples a smiling world."

We see more there than we ordinarily see, not only in that the valley is a dimple in nature's face, but more in that the stalks of waving corn are the unfurled banners of a triumphant King—a King triumphant over Want. This very thought we find

brought out more plainly in three lines from "A Child's Home Long Ago":

> "The soldièr corn-stalks on their battle-ground
> March on to harvest victories, and flaunt
> Their banners o'er the battlements of want."

He teaches us to see more than we see—that's the point. Take "Wortermelon Time," for instance. After dilating at length upon watermelons, and confessing that the way he "hankers after wortermelons is a sin," he calls attention to the "more":

> "Oh, they's more in wortermelons than the purty-colored meat,
> And the overflowin' sweetness of the worter squshed betwixt
> The up'ard and the down'ard motions of a feller's teeth,
> And it's the taste of ripe old age and juicy childhood mixed."

Our Poet is always seeking for the infinite—not so much the infinite in contradistinction to the finite, as the infinite in the finite. He confers spirituality and permanence on the fleeting objects of sense. He makes this world the visible symbol of a spiritual power. He invests the world with light. Thus from a good-natured contentment with the kind of weather that God sorts out and sends him, he reasons, as in "Wet-Weather Talk," to a comforting belief in the wise over-ruling Providence of God in all the vicissitudes of life; for though

"These-here *cy-clones* a-foolin' round—
And back'ard crops!—and wind and rain!—
And yit the corn that's wallerd down
May elbow up again!"

In the beautiful sonnet which he calls "Sun and Rain," he makes us see the glimmering mist of blended sunshine and rain as God's smile; the lily bows like a white saint in prayer; the blossoms, with divine tenderness, lift their wet eyes to heaven as does the Poet:

"All day the sun and rain have been as friends,
Each vying with the other which shall be
Most generous in dowering earth and sea
With their glad wealth, till each, as it descends,
Is mingled with the other, where it blends
In one warm, glimmering mist that falls on me
As once God's smile fell over Galilee.
The lily-cup, filled with it, droops and bends
Like some white saint beside a sylvan shrine
In silent prayer; the roses at my feet,
Baptized with it as with a crimson wine,
Gleam radiant in grasses grown so sweet,
The blossoms lift, with tenderness divine,
Their wet eyes heavenward with these of mine."

After Mr. Riley had read Oliver Davie's "Reveries and Recollections of a Naturalist" (which Robert G. Ingersoll called "one of the finest tributes to Nature ever penned"), he wrote a poem which he calls "The Naturalist." While it purports to be a

description of Oliver Davie, it in very truth describes the service that our Hoosier bard has rendered us; for he has caused us to go forth to the forest where peace and love breathe prayer-like in the breeze and in the coo of doves; he has caused us to uncover our heads and hear the Master speak to us in the spirit of the wood; he has taught us to "see more than we see" in the birds and the grasses and even the rain:

"In gentlest worship has he bowed
To Nature. Rescued from the crowd
And din of town and thoroughfare,
He turns him from all worldly care
Unto the sacred fastness of
The forests, and the peace and love
That breathes there prayer-like in the breeze
And coo of doves in dreamful trees—
Their tops in laps of sunshine laid
Their lower bows all slaked with shade.

"With head uncovered has he stood,
Hearing the Spirit of the Wood—
Hearing aright the Master speak
In trill of bird, and warbling creek;
In lisp of reeds, or rainy sigh
Of grasses as the loon darts by—
Hearing aright the storm and lull,
And all earth's voices wonderful,—
Even this hail an unknown friend
Lifts will he hear and comprehend."

Mr. Riley was a great admirer of John Clark Ridpath. After his death he wrote a tribute which was read at his memorial service in which he gives us a cross-section of his own heart and mind:

> "The skies, the stars, the mountains and the sea,
> He worshiped as their high divinity—
> Nor did his reverent spirit find one thing
> On earth too lowly for his worshiping.
>
> "The weed, the rose, the wildwood or the plain,
> The teeming harvest, or the blighted grain,—
> All—all were fashioned beautiful and good,
> As the soul saw and the senses understood."

That is fine! It all depends upon the soul that sees and the senses that understand. His "reverent spirit" finds nothing "on earth too lowly for his worshiping." Truly, a reverent spirit is a possession not to be lightly esteemed. Reverence is one of the cardinal virtues. When a man has the right kind of eyes he will see God in nature as Jesus saw Him in the flight of birds and in the flowers of the field. He will see Him as Wordsworth saw Him in that lovely valley of the Wye, near Tintern Abbey; or, as once when he saw a single primrose growing upon a rock, and, brooding upon it, said: "Thou art

become to me the court of Deity." It was the great scientist, Louis Agassiz, who said: "Back of the law written in the rocks is the hand that writes; back of the hand is a mind—it is the Mind of the Living God." God is present everywhere. He made the mountains to shoulder up the sky. He clothes the earth with vestments of green. The stars are but sparks struck out on the anvil of His eternal purpose, and His power keeps them burning now in the illimitable depths of space. I have no sympathy with that false supernaturalism that finds God only in signs and wonders. He is as much in the buds of spring, and the growing corn, and the ripening harvest to-day as He was in the giving of manna to the wilderness-wandering Israelites of long ago. After all, the best way to cultivate the sense of reverence and awe is not by some mighty and phenomenal contingency, but by the influence of the commonplace. If we approach each bush with reverence, we may detect a mystic, burning Presence. Riley teaches us to see that "all works" "worthy of Omnipotence" are worthy of our reverence. This is the whole meaning of his poem, "The Rest," the closing stanza of which contains the following lines:

"It was enough, thus childishly to sense
All works—since worthy of Omnipotence—
As worshipful. Therefor, as any child,
He knelt in tenderness of tears, or smiled
His gratefulness, as to a playmate glad
To share His pleasures with a poorer lad."

That is a very beautiful thought: that we should be as simple and sincere in our gratitude to God for the wonderful world He has given us as a poor lad would be to a playmate who had shared his pleasures with him. No wonder that Riley concluded "The All-Golden" with the rapturous outburst:

"My soul soars up the atmosphere
And sings aloud where God can hear,
And all my being leans intent
To mark His smiling wonderment.
O gracious dream, and gracious time,
And gracious theme, and gracious rhyme—
When buds of Spring begin to blow
In blossoms that we used to know
And lure us back along the ways
Of time's all-golden yesterdays!"

Thank you, dear Poet of the People, for the things you have taught us. Your "song makes of Earth a realm of light and shadow," "vast and grand with splendor of the morn," and your voice "makes melodious all things below," as you once

said of your friend, Benj. S. Parker. So do we take your words and make them our own, addressing them back to you with utter sincerity:

"Thy rapt song makes of Earth a realm of light
And shadow mystical as some dreamland
Arched with unfathomed azure—vast and grand
With splendor of the morn; or dazzling bright
With orient noon; or strewn with stars of night
Thick as the daisies blown in grasses fanned
By odorous midsummer breezes and
Showered over by all bird-songs exquisite.
This is thy voice's beatific art—
To make melodious all things below,
Calling through them, from far, diviner space,
Thy clearer hail to us.—The faltering heart
Thou cheerest; and thy fellow mortal so
Fares onward under Heaven with lifted face."

CHAPTER IV

The Doctrine of God in Riley's Rhymes

EVERY man has some God. It would be just as reasonable to talk about vegetation growing independently of the light of the sun as to talk about man's existence independent of a god. His idea about God is fundamental. As the light of the sun gives color to everything; to the modest violet blooming alone in the fence-corner, no less than to the mighty oak that fronts the storm, so man's conception of God colors every detail of his life, not only his thinking, but also his doing. Deed is only the practical expression of creed. If you know what a man's idea of God is, you can construct the main outlines of his whole belief; for in that idea is bound up what he thinks of right and wrong, of sin and salvation, of time and eternity, of his relation to his fellow men and of his relation to the Great Unseen.

If we go through James Whitcomb Riley's poetry to discover what he believed concerning God, we shall be as refreshed in spirit as though bland but bracing breezes had blown upon us from the hills of

Heaven; we shall be as comforted as a fearful child is comforted when its mother croons to it and cuddles it in the dark and silent night. We can group practically all he says about God under four headings: (1) An unquestioning belief in the existence of a personal and imminent God; (2) a firm faith in an overruling Divine Providence; (3) confidence that God hears and answers prayer; (4) the foregoing rest upon the conviction that God is good and merciful.

We find in Riley no trace of that sneering, cynical attitude toward religious questions which was only too common among many of his compatriots. He exercises what Professor James calls "the will to believe." Plaintively he sings "We Must Believe," each stanza of which poem ends with the fervent words:

> "Lord, I believe:
> Help Thou mine unbelief!"

To one who is able to think the question through the first reason for believing in the existence of God is the fact that we are able to understand something of the laws that obtain in the universe. For just as we conclude that a musical score that can be understood by a rational mind must have been pro-

duced by a rational mind, even so we conclude that if a rational mind is able to interpret this great piece of cosmic music which we call the universe, it must be the product of the rational mind which we call God. The modern atheist, in offering a mechanical explanation of the universe, spells nature with a capital "N" and science with a capital "S." His "Nature" is the rival of God, and his "Science" leaves the surface of things, where it belongs, and goes beyond the phenomena, and prates of the infinities and the eternities and "the iron chain of necessity."

In two stanzas of his long and wholesome poem, "The Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers," Mr. Riley introduces us in his quaint Hoosier style to such characters as these in this fashion:

"And onc't—when gineral loafin'-place wuz old Shoe-Shop—and all
The gang'ud git in there and brace their backs ag'inst the wall
And *settle* questions that had went onsettled long enough,—
Like 'wuz no Heav'n—ner no torment'—*jes' talkin' awful rough!*

"There was Sloke Haines and old Ike Knight and Coonrod Simmes—all three
Ag'inst the Bible and the Light, and scoutin' Deity.
'Science,' says Ike, 'it DIM*onstrates*—it takes nobody's word—*Scriptur'* er not,—it *'vestigates* ef sich things could occurred!'"

Now, in Mr. Riley we find no trace of that incredulity and spirit of skeptical mockery which scintillates endless epigrams and facetious flippancies, counting nothing too sacred for its acid jest. But just the same, he is able to wield the sharp sword of sarcasm with wonderful skill when the notion strikes him; and we can not but clap our hands in admiration at the fine answer he causes Doc Sifers to make to the cock-sure dogmatism of the shallow-pated shoe-shop loafers:

"Well, Doc he heerd this,—he'd drapped in a minute, fer to git
A tore-off heel pegged on ag'in,—and as he stood on it
And stomped and grinned, he says to Ike, 'I s'pose now, purty soon
Some lightin'-bug, indignant-like, 'll 'vestigate the moon!

"'No, Ike,' says Doc, 'this world hain't saw no brains like yourn and mine
With sense enough to grasp a law 'at takes a brain divine.—
I've bared the thoughts of brains in doubt, and felt their finest pulse,—
And mortal brains jes' won't turn out omnipotent results.'"

This is sound philosophy. The mind is awe-stricken as the facts of science flash upon it. In whatever direction we look we see unmistakable evidences of wisdom, power, benevolence and design. Since the universe bears the impress of mind, a

mind is the only adequate cause of the universe. Only a mind great enough to cause all other existence can be self-existent. It requires God to "turn out omnipotent results."

When Mr. Riley's friend, John Boyle O'Reilly, died, our poet declared:

> "'Tis promotion that has come
> Thus upon him. Stricken dumb
> Be your moanings dolorous!
> God knows what He does."

Let us hold fast to that profound doctrine, so simply expressed: "God knows what He does!" The hidden power carrying on the world is purposeful and intelligent. As the scheduled running of a locomotive can be accounted for only in the acknowledgment that an engineer is on board, so to talk sensibly about the dynamism of the world we must lift it to the plane of volitional causation. In his poem, "Good-by er Howdy-do," Riley expresses it exactly:

> "Some One's runnin' this concern
> That's got nothin' else to learn;
> Ef *He's* willin', we'll pull through—
> Say good-by er howdy-do!"

Anselm once said: "The idea of God in the mind of man is the one unanswerable evidence of the ex-

istence of God." This is up-to-date reasoning; for in a world of reality every natural appetite, desire or power has its counterpart. There is air for the lungs, light for the eye, food for the stomach, truth for the reason, love to answer those who love. Now, man is constitutionally religious. The universal idea of the existence of God is intuitive; it inheres in the very nature of man. Shall we say that nature, which never deceives man in aught else, plays fast and loose with him in this respect? But if the argument is worth anything it points not only to the existence of a Supreme Being, but to a good God who is worthy of our trust, love and worship. In a tender poem, fittingly called "The Enduring," Riley describes the old shoe-shop at Greenfield, Indiana, which he frequented when a boy. He concludes each one of the three verses with the legend that was cut in antique lines over the portal of the shoe-shop:

"Wouldst have a friend?—Wouldst know what friend is best?
Have God thy friend: He passeth all the rest."

Our gentle poet tells us that as he reads the words over again, his *old* eyes make the meaning clearer than did the eyes of youth. Man's religious nature

is the crown of his being, and can be satisfied with nothing less than God as its counterpart. As the eye was made for light and the ear for sound, so man was made for God. The sentiment with which the poem "Unless" closes is true:

> "O souls that thirst, and hearts that fast,
> And natures faint with famishing,
> God lift and lead and safely bring
> You to your own at last!"

God lifts and leads and satisfies! This spiritual experience is the most practical evidence of God. Experience is the final test. I have made the test. I have had the spiritual experience which convinces me of the existence of God. I do not stand alone; I am in company with the truest, sanest and best among the sons of men; and I am in line with the best philosophy of the time. Pragmatism, of which we hear so much, only means: Does it work? Is it worth while? Of what value is it? And history has proved that to surrender to the great and good God, to come into communion and fellowship with Him, makes for the holiest character, and inspires the noblest life. By this method, cowards have become courageous; libertines have become chaste; drunkards have become sober; liars have become

truthful; doubters have become disciples; selfish lives have become generous and Christ-like. Have you doubts about the existence of God? Then go to Him through Jesus Christ, by faith link your life with His, and you will be able to say with Riley, who, after a most exquisite description of "The Shower," in lines that might have occurred in the rhapsodies of Isaiah, says:

"While I, transfigured by some wondrous art,
Bowed with the thirsty lilies to the sod,
My empty soul brimmed over, and my heart
Drenched with the love of God."

That "God is not disquieted" is a great truth that gives sanity to the universe and peace to the mind. It is the motif of "The Legend Glorified":

"Though awful tempests thunder overhead,
I deem that God is not disquieted,—
The faith that trembles somewhat yet is sure
Through storm and darkness of a way secure.

"Bleak winters, when the naked spirit hears
The break of hearts, through stinging sleet of tears,
I deem that God is not disquieted;
Against all stresses am I clothed and fed.

"Nay, even with fixed eyes and broken breath,
My feet dip down into the tides of death,
Nor any friend be left, nor prayer be said,
I deem that God is not disquieted."

Is that not a good commentary on the Scripture: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Upon the changelessness of God rests our entire confidence in Him, and our reliance upon His proffered mercies and His gracious plans. He "is not disquieted." He is not a God of caprice. He can manage His own work. Heaven is not thrown into a panic because of some temporary turmoil on earth.

God is present with us in nature. That is a doctrine of Scripture. The Book of Psalms is a veritable handbook of poetic description. To Jesus, all nature, birds and flowers and fields, spoke of the love and care of God. So, also, does our dear Riley teach us, in his poem to Oliver Davie, "The Naturalist," that if we have hearing properly attuned we shall "hear aright the Master speak" in all the sweet sounds of nature:

> "In gentlest worship has he bowed
> To Nature. Rescued from the crowd
> And din of town and thoroughfare,
> He turns him from all worldly care
> Unto the sacred fastness of
> The forests, and the peace and love

That breathes there prayer-like in the breeze
And coo of doves in dreamful trees—
Their tops in laps of sunshine laid,
Their lower boughs all slaked with shade.

"With head uncovered has he stood,
Hearing the Spirit of the Wood—
Hearing aright the Master speak
In trill of bird, and warbling creek;
In lisp of reeds, or rainy sigh
Of grasses as the loon darts by—
Hearing aright the storm and lull,
And all earth's voices wonderful,—
Even this hail an unknown friend
Lifts will he hear and comprehend."

But not only is God with us in nature: He is with us in history. One can not read Riley's "America's Thanksgiving (1900)" without being hushed with a reverential awe. If the ancient Hebrews built their temple with a consciousness of the divine overshadowing all their work and lending it unspeakable solemnity, no less truly is one who reads this "Thanksgiving" poem conscious of the overshadowing presence of the great God in all our nation's life; so that with clearer sight we see our boundless debt to God who causes wrong to grow into right, and who transforms the clanging fray of battle discord "into a pastoral song of peace and rest."

"So, let us thank Thee, with all self aside,
Nor any lingering taint of mortal pride;
As here to Thee we dare
Uplift our faltering prayer,
Lend it some fervor of the glorified."

In 1620 a Dutch trading ship sailed up the James River, with its cargo of human slaves. The iniquitous business grew on these shores until it became a hideous nightmare to all right-thinking people. Yet its defenders drove their arguments home with logic and clinched them with Scripture. Some of its horrors were "Told by the Noted Traveler" in Mr. Riley's "Child-World." After this tale had been told, one of those who had listened to it with flushed face, yearned to know

"That all unwritten sequence that the Lord
Of Righteousness must write with flame and sword,
Some awful session of His patient thought.
Just then it was, his good old mother caught
His blazing eye—so that its fire became
But as an ember—though it burned the same.
It seemed to her, she said, that she had heard
It was the *Heavenly* Parent never erred,
And not the *earthly* one that had such grace;
'Therefore, my son,' she said, with lifted face
And eyes, 'let no one dare anticipate
The Lord's intent. While *He* waits, *we* will wait.'"

And the business grew until it was overthrown by the shock of the sword. Yet through it all God wrought a larger human freedom, and placed upon the white man's heart a new sense of responsibility for the salvation of the dark continent. It is always so. The human will blocks God's plans sometimes. But He can afford to wait. He will triumph in the end. He is always keeping watch over His own. He sways the future. True statesmanship through the ages has been nothing more or less than the ability on the part of some men to discern the direction in which God is going, and to move things out of the way for Him.

Riley ever sees his entire dependence on Omnipotence for every gift, and feels that God does all things transcendently well. This is the secret of his good-natured contentment with whatever Providence does. I like his "Philosophy" in which he administers this gentle rebuke to the superficial egotist:

> "The signs is bad when folks commence
> A-findin' fault with Providence,
> And balkin' 'cause the earth don't shake
> At ev'ry prancin' step they take."

The same doctrine of the unerring overruling Providence of a good God who will bring victory

out of defeat and success out of failure, is unmistakably set forth in the dialect poem "Wet-Weather Talk," which is so good and expresses this splendid philosophy of Riley's in such a striking way that I shall give it all:

"It hain't no use to grumble and complane;
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice.—
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
W'y, rain's my choice.

"Men ginerly, to all intents—
Although, they're apt to grumble some—
Puts most theyr trust in Providence,
And takes things as they come—
That is, the commonality
Of men that's lived as long as me
Has watched the world enough to learn
They're not the boss of this concern.

"With *some,* of course, it's different—
I've saw *young* men that knowed it all,
And didn't like the way things went
On this terrestchul ball;—
But all the same, the rain, some way
Rained jest as hard on picnic day;
Er, when they railly *wanted* it
It mayby wouldn't rain a bit!

"In this existence, dry and wet
Will overtake the best of men—
Some little skift o' clouds'll shet
The sun off now and then.—

And mayby, whilse you're wondern who
You've fool-like lent your umbrell' to,
And *want* it—out'll pop the sun,
And you'll be glad you hain't got none!

"It aggervates the farmers, too—
They's too much wet, er too much sun,
Er work, er waitin' round to do
Before the plowin' 's done;
And mayby, like as not, the wheat,
Jest as it's lookin' hard to beat,
Will ketch the storm—and jest about
The time the corn's a-jintin' out.

"These-here *cy-clones* a-foolin' round—
And back'ard crops!—and wind and rain!—
And yit the corn that's wallerd down
May elbow up again!—
They ain't no sense, as I can see,
Fer mortuls, sich as us, to be
A-faultin' Natchur's wise intents,
And lockin' horns with Providence!

"It hain't no use to grumble and complain;
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice.—
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
W'y, rain's my choice."

This is not fatalism. It is the bed-rock of the most comfortable philosophy of life. Let the "rain" stand for all the pain, the annoyances, the disappointments, the frustrated plans of life, the things

that perplex us and that vex us, and then remember that just when the *"rain"* threatens,

> "And maybe, whilse you're wundern who
> You've fool-like lent your umbrell' to,
> And *want* it—out'll pop the sun,
> And you'll be glad you hain't got none!"

And the calamity that impended does not happen—or if it does, and turns you aside from the path you have worked out for yourself, then when you have climbed the hill of the future and look back over the path you have trod you can see unmistakable signs of the guiding hand of God all the way past. True, God is incomprehensible in His Providence; but Providence is inferred from Redemption, and that in turn shifts back to Creation. For God created the universe because of His desire to communicate His life; and to it, therefore, He holds the same relation that a parent does to a child. It might help us to start with the parental instinct, with its patience, its unselfishness, its self-denying love, and reason from that up to God. It would be well for us, also, to recall the Providences in our own lives, to have an autobiography in our minds of the influences that have entered into the shaping of our lives and the molding of our careers. Thus will it be

easy for us to make "rain our choice" when God sorts it out for us. For we know that "God is mightier than the storm," as Riley says in "Heat-Lightning":

"If the darkened heavens lower,
Wrap thy cloak around thy form;
Though the tempest rise in power,
God is mightier than the storm!"

One of the greatest hymns of the Church in which Christians have expressed their faith for many years begins:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

It is a stately and majestic hymn, but no truer to Scripture and not as understandable to the common people as is "A Hymb of Faith" written by James Whitcomb Riley. It was one of his early poems to appear with the pseudonym "Benj. F. Johnson of Boone," being preceded only by "The Old Swimmin'-Hole" and "Thoughts fer the Discuraged Farmer." Mr. Riley began to write these "Benj. F. Johnson" poems while he was employed on the *Indianapolis Journal* in the summer of 1882. At first he was not known as the author of them. He represented them as having been written by a "coun-

try poet," by this method creating for them the atmosphere of perfect reality. Usually he composed a letter, also purporting to be from "Benj. F. Johnson of Boone County," to accompany the publication of the poem. Thus, with "A Hymb of Faith" was supposed to come this letter:

"It will be an undoubtable surprise to you to git the poem I now send to you herein enclosed; but I was a-readin' one which starts out 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to purform,' and the idy struck me that I could write off somepin in that style which would express a man's views," etc.

Then follows the "Hymb of Faith," which is more of a prayer than a hymn:

"O, Thou that doth all things devise
And fashion fer the best,
He'p us who sees with mortul eyes
To overlook the rest.

"They's times, of course, we grope in doubt,
And in afflictions sore;
So knock the louder, Lord, without,
And we'll unlock the door.

"Make us to feel, when times looks bad,
And tears in pity melts,
Thou wast the only he'p we had
When they was nothin' else."

Then follow a half-dozen stanzas describing the buf-

fetings, and yet the triumph, of the life of Jesus, after which comes this expression of faith:

"No matter, then, how all is mixed
In our near-sighted eyes,
All things is fer the best, and fixed
Out straight in Paradise.

"Then take things as God sends 'em here,
And, ef we live er die,
Be more and more contenteder,
Without a-astin' why."

Are you lonesome, so lonesome, and does your back ache, and your head ache, and your heart ache? God is with you—you are not alone. In the person of Jesus Christ, He said: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Is the road that you are traveling rough and steep? But if you look you may see the Master's footprints in the road. And full often God uses our aches and sorrows and burdens to make us conscious of His presence, according to Riley's touching poem, "There Is a Need":

"There is a need for every ache or pain
That falls unto our lot. No heart may bleed
That resignation may not heal again
And teach us—there's a need.

"There is a need for every tear that drips
Adown the face of sorrow. None may heed,
But weeping washes whiter on the lips
Our prayers—and there's a need.

"There is need for weariness and dearth
Of all that brings delight. At topmost speed
Of pleasure sobs may break amid our mirth
Unheard—and there's a need.

"There is need for all the growing load
Of agony we bear as years succeed;
For lo, the Master's footprints in the road
Before us—There's a need."

Is this anything more than a poetic way of expressing the great words of Saint Paul: "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose." *All* things: the dark and the light, the sad and the joyous. "The Best is Good Enough" is the title of one of our poet's most thoughtful productions, the climax of which is:

"One only knows our needs, and He
Does all of the distributing.
I quarrel not with Destiny:
The best is good enough for me."

God is the Divine Physician. He "knows our needs." We shall trust Him to do "all the distributing." He knows what distribution to make of the "all things" to make them *work together* for

our good, as a physician knows how to compound certain drugs, any one of which alone might be injurious to us, but which *work together* for our healing.

The same comforting thought is repeated in the poem entitled "We to Sigh Instead of Sing," setting forth the thoughtful goodness of God. He introduces this thought by describing a day of "rain, rain, nothing but rain," which was followed by a day of shining splendor, and then passes on to show that the tender God will cause the day of weeping to be followed by a day of rejoicing. He says:

> "We to sigh instead of sing,
> *Yesterday*, in sorrow,
> While the Lord was fashioning
> This for our To-morrow!"

In "The Sermon of the Rose" our bard again expresses his faith in the intense and personal care of God. This mellifluous, highly symbolical poem opens with these words:

> "Wilful we are, in our infirmity
> Of childish questioning and discontent.
> Whate'er befalls us is divinely meant—
> Thou Truth the clearer for thy mystery!
> Make us to meet what is or is to be
> With fervid welcome, knowing it is sent
> To serve us in some way full excellent,

Though we discern it all belatedly.
The rose buds, and the rose blooms, and the rose
Bows in the dews, and in its fulness, lo,
Is in the lover's hand,—then on the breast
Of her he loves,—and there dies.—And who knows
What fate of all a rose may undergo
Is fairest, dearest, sweetest, loveliest?"

Thank you, dear Riley; I do believe that "what-e'er befalls us is divinely meant"—provided, of course, that we "love God." Mr. Riley once wrote a letter to a friend in adversity in which he said:

"No mortal condition is better than the one He seems to weigh you down with. In my own case I am coming every day to see clearer the gracious uses of adversity.—Simply, it is not adversity. It is the very tenderest—most loving and most helpful touch of the hand Divine."

In harmony with the doctrine of this letter, we have his poem "Kissing the Rod," which probably is as complete a summary of his message to mankind as is to be found in any one of his poems:

"O heart of mine, we shouldn't
Worry so!
What we've missed of calm we couldn't
Have, you know!
What we've met of stormy pain,
And of sorrow's driving rain,
We can better meet again,
If it blow!

"We have erred in that dark hour
We have known,
When our tears fell with the shower,
All alone!
Were not shine and shower blent
As the Gracious Master meant?—
Let us temper our content
With His own.

"For, we know, not every morrow
Can be sad;
So, forgetting all the sorrow
We have had,
Let us fold away our fears,
And put by our foolish tears,
And through all the coming years
Just be glad."

In "At Sea," he represents us as being out on a sea, "with lifted sails of prayer," in quest of light, and not finding it. Then he beseeches that the One who wrought earth and sea will

"Blow back upon our foolish quest
With all the driving rain
Of blinding tears and wild unrest,
And waft us home again!"

"Thoughts fer the Discuraged Farmer" was the second poem that Mr. Riley wrote under the pen-name of "Benj. F. Johnson of Boone County." In it, the hale, sound, artless, lovable character is at his

best. It is brimful of the most delightful pictorial language. It expresses immaterial ideas by words which suggest pictures from the farm. It is a piece of the wild, capricious music of nature. It is an outburst of lyrical feeling. It is not to our purpose to give it all here; but rather do I pick out a few lines that reaffirm the providential care of God:

"Some says the crops is ruined, and the corn's drownded out,
And propha-sy the wheat will be a failure, without doubt;
But the kind Providence that has never failed us yet,
Will be on hands onc't more at the 'leventh hour, I bet!"

Then after giving further and worthy reasons for rejoicing, the poem ends with those oft-quoted glorious lines:

"Whatever be our station, with Providence fer guide,
Sich fine circumstances ort to make us satisfied;
Fer the world is full of roses, and the roses full of dew,
And the dew is full of heavenly love that drips fer me and you."

How different that from the philosophical doctrine called Pessimism—that the world, if not the worst possible, is worse than none at all. In another of his poems entitled "Our Queer Old World," Mr. Riley has four stanzas in which he describes in dialect style the certain funny, and tragical, and always to-be-complained-at existence of the child, and

of the lad, and of the young chap, and of the old man. And in the last stanza after describing the follies and shows and lies and bad weather, and infirmities of age, he says:

"*We're* not a-faultin' the Lord's own plan—
All things 's jest
At their best.—
It's a purty good world, old man!"

Another of the "Benj. F. Johnson of Boone" poems that sets forth his homely philosophy of contentment with things the way the Lord does them is "Us Farmers in the Country." After enumerating the phases of the weather at which "we're apt to grumble some" (and the weather symbolizes all the vicissitudes of life) he decides:

"Now what I'd like and what you'd like is plane enugh to see:
It's jest to have old Providence drop round on you and me
And ast us what our view is first, regardin' shine er rain,
And post 'em when to shet her off, er let her on again!
And yit I'd ruther, after all—consider'n' other chores
I' got on hands, a-tendin' both to my affares and yours—
I'd ruther miss the blame I'd git, a-rulin' things up thare,
And spend my extry time in praise and gratitude and prayer."

The last phrase introduces us to another phase of Riley's doctrine of God: "And spend my extra time" not only in "praise and gratitude" but also in

"prayer." He has no more doubt about the efficacy of prayer than Saint James has. James says: "Pray one for another. . . . The supplication of a righteous man availeth much." Riley makes his "Noted Traveler" tell the story of certain slaves who had escaped from slavery, and kept on faithfully praying and working until their every son at last was free as themselves, and then declares:

> "—So prevail
> The faithful!—So had the Lord upheld
> His servants of both deed and prayer,—
> His the glory unparalleled—
> *Theirs* the reward."

The same positive tone closes the "Envoy" of one of his earlier volumes:

> ". . . *Listen,* friend!
> God answers with a silence pure as gold—
> Just as of old."

Hence, if we do not get the answer we expected, if no answer comes but silence, still his faith in God's goodness is so strong that the silence is "pure as gold." And he sees a blessing in delayed answers, for in his "Thanksgiving" poem he exhorts us to thankfulness for love and sorrow, for winter clouds and storms, for summer calms, and "for all

the things that come as alms from out the open hand of Providence," but especially,

> "Let us be thankful—thankful for the prayers
> Whose gracious answers were long, long delayed,
> That they might fall upon us unawares,
> And bless us, as in greater need we prayed."

The spirit and stress of prayer pervades much of our bard's work, even when it is not labeled as devotional; but there are enough "prayers" to merit being collected and issued in a separate volume. They are as helpful as the prayers of Robert Louis Stevenson, and would not be out of place on any shelf of devotional classics. Take for example, such poems as "Ike Walton's Prayer," "The Mortul Prayer," "The Prayer Perfect," "Kneeling with Herrick," "The Christmas Carol," "God Bless Us Every One." In "A Hymb of Faith," in early print, the following lines were used as a sub-title:

> "So ran the honest, earnest prayer
> Of old Ben Johnson pleading there."

It is worth while praying to God because we are assured of God's goodness and love and tender mercy. He sympathizes with us. This is the comforting and inspiring teaching of "He Cometh in Sweet Sense":

"He cometh in sweet sense to thee,
Be it or dawn, or noon, or night,—
No deepest pain, nor halest glee
But He discerneth it aright.

"If there be tears bedim thine eyes,
His sympathy thou findest plain,—
The darkest midnight of the skies
He weepeth with the tears of rain.

"If thou art joyful, He hath had
His gracious will, and lo, 'tis well,—
As thou are glad, so He is glad,
Nor mercy strained one syllable.

"Wild vows are words, as prayers are words,
God's mercy is not measured by
Our poor deservings: He affords
To listen, if we laugh or cry."

Amidst the jarring contentions of opposing creeds with emphasis upon this or that man-made difference, we so often forget that the mercy of God in unrestrained qualities is offered to all; even as the rain loves all leaves, or as the sun kisses the little hillocks no less than it does the great mountains that are eager for the anguish of holding up the sky on their brawny shoulders. "God's Mercy"—what a big name for a little verse of four lines, and yet, who is there among the blundering, stumbling, sinning sons of man that does not think that the poet speaks the truth when he says:

"Behold, one faith endureth still—
Let factions rail and creeds contend,
God's mercy *was*, and *is*, and *will*
Be with us, foe and friend."

It is because of our firm and steadfast faith in God's mercy that we join with Riley in the prayer he offers in "America's Thanksgiving":

"And, Father, give us first to comprehend,
No ill can come from Thee; lean Thou and lend
Us clearer sight to see
Our boundless debt to Thee,
Since all Thy deeds are blessings, in the end."

Who has not waited in "The Watches of the Night"? What a description of each one's own experiences at some time in his life. We have in this poem the darkness, the desolation, the contrition, the fear, the awful hush, the stifling darkness, the spectral visits, the shuddering sins of wrongs we have wrought; and then he asks whether we dare *believe* that we shall win the dawn at last; and then he shows that One leads through "The Watches of the Night":

"He is with us through all trials, in His mercy and His might;—
With our mothers there about Him, all our sorrow disappears,—

Till the silence of our sobbing is the prayer the Master
hears
And His hand is laid upon us with the tenderness of tears
In the waning of the watches of the night."

So, because we believe in God, who loves us and cares for us and watches over us, and shapes our destiny and answers our prayers, we will take up Riley's "Song of the Cruise":

"And in rapture we'll ride through the stormiest gales,
For God's hand's on the helm and His breath in the sails.
Then murmur no more,
In lull or in roar,
But smile and be brave till the voyage is o'er."

CHAPTER V

The Christ in Riley's Rhymes—A Christmas Meditation

THE Christmas issue of the *New York World* in 1890 contained greetings from the most famous writers of that day—such writers as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, John P. Newman, James Whitcomb Riley, and others. Mr. Riley's "Greeting" was telegraphed by request to the editor of the *World* on the day before Christmas. It consists of only six lines; but those six lines reveal the kindly, gentle spirit of America's best-loved poet—his simplicity, his democracy, his cheerful optimism, his love of mankind, and his adherence to the ancient beliefs and pieties. His "Greeting" was as follows:

> "A word of Godspeed and good cheer
> To all on earth, or far or near,
> Or friend or foe, or thine or mine—
> In echo of the voice divine,
> Heard when the star bloomed forth and lit
> The world's face, with God's smile on it."

What an unusually beautiful way that is of speaking of the incarnation of our Lord! Ten years before, in one of the most mellifluous poems he ever wrote, "Sun and Rain," Mr. Riley had made use of practically the same phrase where he spoke of the sun and rain that all day had vied with each other in dowering earth and sea:

> "With their glad wealth, till each, as it descends,
> Is mingled with the other, where it blends
> In one warm, glimmering mist that fell on me
> As once God's smile fell over Galilee."

I suppose if we were expressing the same idea in unadorned prose that instead of speaking of God's "smile," we would speak of the favor or propitiousness of God manifested in the coming of Jesus into the world.

Another of Mr. Riley's Christmas poems is entitled "Das Krist Kindel." In it he describes how on a chill December night, while the hungry winter prowled without, he sat in his "old split-bottomed rocker" musing all alone before a glowing fire, and while he mused he saw in vision "the fireplace changing to a bright proscenium." With exquisite charm he evokes and exhibits a creation of little actors on a mimic stage, engaged with delights

delectable until they espy a Baby-Boy, then in an ecstasy of glee they throw aside their treasures as they cluster around him. He is described as

". . . a wondrous little fellow, with a dainty double-chin,
And chubby cheeks, and dimples for the smiles to blossom in;"

and while a group, presenting costly presents, surrounds the happy mother, our seer thrills with awe and wonder at the following melody of prayer that drifts o'er his hearing:

"By the splendor in the heavens, and the hush upon the sea,
And the majesty of silence reigning over Galilee,—
We feel Thy kingly presence, and we humbly bow the knee
And lift our hearts and voices in gratefulness to Thee.

"Thy messenger has spoken, and our doubts have fled and gone
As the dark and spectral shadows of the night before the dawn;
And, in the kindly shelter of the light around us drawn,
We would nestle down forever in the breast we lean upon.

"You have given us a shepherd—you have given us a guide,
And the light of Heaven grew dimmer when You sent him from Your side,
But he comes to lead Thy children where the gates will open wide
To welcome his returning when his works are glorified."

The birth of Jesus Christ is the greatest event in the annals of time. The historical facts of His life are as well authenticated as are the facts concerning

Julius Cæsar, Socrates, or any of the other great ones of history. His birth marks the boundary line between B. C. and A. D., and the infidel who to-day writes a letter, setting down the date on it, unwittingly acknowledges the fact that nineteen hundred and twenty years ago Jesus Christ was born.

When the poet says, "the light of Heaven grew dimmer when You sent him from Your side," it is only another way of saying what Saint Paul had said long before concerning "Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." The Incarnation is not a division of God; it is rather a new self-expression of God—made possible because of the kinship between God and man, and yet possible because of the greatness which belongs to God alone.

"You have given us a shepherd—you have given us a guide,"

that is the twenty-third Psalm, plus the tenth chapter of St. John.

". . . he comes to lead Thy children where the gates will open wide
To welcome his returning when his works are glorified."

That is the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John.

The last Christmas before his death, Mr. Riley sent me as a greeting the second verse of the following "Child's Christmas Carol":

"Christ used to be like you and me,
When just a lad in Galilee,—
So when we pray, on Christmas Day,
He favors first the prayers we say;
Then waste no tear, but pray with cheer,
This gladdest day of all the year:

"O Brother mine of birth Divine,
Upon this natal day of thine
Bear with our stress of happiness
Nor count our reverence less
Because with glee and jubilee
Our hearts go singing up to Thee."

The teaching of that is plain: "Christ used to be like you and me." He lived a genuine human life; He increased in wisdom and in stature; He worked; He grew weary; He suffered the pangs of hunger; nothing that belongs to normal human life was foreign to Him. But that is not all: He was "of birth divine." Under ordinary circumstances it would be difficult to believe in a miraculous birth; but Christ's divine life justifies belief in His miraculous conception. It would be just as difficult to explain away

the life that He lived as to explain away His birth. Since His whole life was a wonder, why should it not have begun as a wonder? As we move along in this thought, we feel that our intelligence will reel with the stupendous confusion of the mystery of God becoming a child, when we turn to "A Hymb of Faith," which was written by our gentle poet in the Hoosier dialect, and was first published as a "Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone" poem—a pseudonym under which Riley published his earlier dialect verses, in order to create more perfectly for them the air of perfect reality. "A Hymb of Faith" was not written on the subject we are now considering; but out of the heart of it we take the following stanzas:

"Ef storms and tempusts dred to see
  Makes black the heavens ore,
They done the same in Galilee
  Two thousand years before.

"But after all, the golden sun
  Poured out its flood on them
That watched and waited fer the One
  Then borned in Bethlyham.

"Also, the star of holy writ
  Made noonday of the night,
Whiles other stars that looked at it
  Was envious with delight.

"The sages then in wurship bowed,
From ev'ry clime so fare;
O, sinner, think of that glad crowd
That congergated thare!

"They was content to fall in ranks
With one that knowed the way
From good old Jurden's stormy banks
Clean up to Jedgmunt Day."

That explains why Christmas Day is the birthday of the best hopes in man. Nothing that can be said about man's rights and powers and prerogatives approaches even remotely to this: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." The eternal God took our human nature upon Himself that He might approach us in our own language and suffer temptation in all points like as we do, and wear this human nature as our Representative before the throne of God; and thus He becomes our Shepherd and Guide, for He knows the way

"From good old Jurden's stormy banks
Clean up to Jedgmunt Day."

The Person resulting from the Incarnation, truly human and truly divine, was a genuine person, possessed of a consciousness and a will, who saw things as they are. Is not this the teaching of the chorus

in the "Plantation Hymn"—one of the few poems which Riley has written in the negro dialect—which runs as follows:

"Mahster! Jesus
You done come down to please us,
And dahs de good Lord sees us,
As he goes walkin' by!"

Truly, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

In "A Song for Christmas," our national bard asks that we chant for him a jovial song, filled with laughter, and the echo of childish voices, and the blare of tasseled bugles, and the throb of the toy drum; but his tone sweetens, as with his eyes on the spiritual meaning of the day, he says:

"But O let your voice fall fainter,
Till, blent with a minor tone,
You temper your song with the beauty
Of the pity Christ hath shown."

That is right fine; for Christ's whole life was a ministry of usefulness. He went about doing good. He was moved with compassion for the people who were distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd. His hands were always reached out in help to those who stood in need. He grew foot-

sore and weary as He tramped earth's dusty highways on His mission of immeasurable mercy. And just because James Whitcomb Riley was touched with the pity which Jesus showed, he exhorts:

"And sing one verse for the voiceless;
And yet, ere the song be done,
A verse for the ears that hear not,
And a verse for the sightless one:

"For though it be time for singing
A merry Christmas glee,
Let a slow sweet voice of pathos
Run through the melody."

Our typical American poet never questions the miracles of Christ. Poets have always been truer teachers than the logicians. They are seers. Poetry is the celestial garment of truth. That is why the poet has no difficulty over the "violation of the laws of nature." He knows that a law of nature can not compel God; for all the potency a law has is the potency of the person it expresses. Mr. Riley seems to take it for granted that given such a Christ as the Gospel writers have drawn, and it would be just as natural for Him to perform miracles as for a skilled pilot to guide a ship. Call the ship "nature," and the pilot supernatural, and you have the whole story.

Hence, when Riley was asked to write a poem for a G. A. R. Encampment, he wrote "A Peace-Hymn of the Republic," in which he described the Ship of State as having groped its way through the blinding smoke of our Civil War, and then these words:

"As One who spake the dead awake, with life-blood leaping warm—
Who walked the troubled waters, all unscathed, in mortal form,—
We felt our Pilot's presence with His hand upon the storm,
As we went sailing on."

It is all there: a belief in Christ's miracles of long ago, and a belief in his overruling Presence with us to-day. Is this not a good place to close this Christmas meditation? For the Ship of our Ideals this Christmas-tide is creaking and groaning and trembling under the terrible storm of world-unrest. To feel the Presence of the Miracle-Worker of old as our Pilot, and to believe that somehow or other He has His hand upon the storm; it is enough.

CHAPTER VI

The Cross in Riley's Rhymes: A Passion Week Meditation

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY is not commonly thought of as a religious poet. He is famous for his child rhymes, his nature poems and his humorous poems in the Hoosier dialect. Yet in a very real sense he is a religious poet; not because of the recurrence of holy phrases in his work; but because of the spirit which permeates the whole, as an incandescent light shines through an alabaster vase. His heart is often hushed in reverence and in his understanding is a temple upon whose altar burns the celestial fire of poetry.

Can I find in him, then, this Passion Week, anything to minister to the mood of the season? If so, it must have to do with the Cross. The Cross is the key-word that expresses the whole of this week's significance at once. It is the master-word of our religion. The Cross of Christ is the most wonder-

ful subject that ever appealed to the intellect, the conscience and the imagination of mankind. I do not refer merely to the Roman gallows. I mean rather the "Cross" which was fashioned in eternity, and whose shadow falls on the disk of the whole scheme of things. I pass from the sign to the thing signified, meaning nothing less than the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we find mention of this fact in Riley? I have read every one of the eleven hundred and three poems which he has written, and in only five of them do I find this subject mentioned. And how is it expressed in these?

One of Mr. Riley's earlier poems, entitled "The Vision of Rabbi Ben Isaac," opens with these words:

> "For three score years my wandering feet have strayed
> Along a path wherein no footprint lay
> Of Him, who of the cross a guide-board made
> To point me out the way."

What is that? The Cross of Christ is a guide-board pointing us the way in which to walk? It is even so. And to what does the Cross point us? Tell us, dear Riley; for I am allowing you to give direction to this meditation.

First of all, it condemns a spirit of self-righteousness. This is the teaching of the poem from which I have just quoted. In glowing imagery Rabbi Ben Isaac is made to relate how he dreamed that he was dead to all outward semblance, but with a scrap of unfading reason still in his head. He saw his floating spirit plume its wings for its upward flight, yet with a look of awe hesitating. Then

> "'Go on!' I called to it. 'Leap into space,
> And sweep a way to glory with thy wings!'"

But though the wings were crimson-dyed with hues of Paradise, his spirit was troubled because they were "such trembling things!"

> "'Nay, glorious things are they,' I cried amazed,
> And veiled my vision from their dazzling light—
> 'So, get thee gone—their maker must be praised.'"

That is the common character and disposition of those who walk

> "Along a path where no footprint lay
> Of Him who of the cross a guide-board made"

—they are self-righteous—self-made, and "their maker must be praised." Obedient to Ben Isaac's command, his spirit sailed across the gulf of dark-

ness until it seemed no larger than a flake of starlight, but when it saw the heavens bloom and the angels at the door swarming out and in:

> "Then suddenly the voice in quaverings
> Fell wailingly—'Alas! for I alone
> Of all the glorious throng have tarnished wings
> That Heaven will not own.
>
> "'The angel Truth has pityingly said
> That every plume impure Christ will condemn,
> And that the stain self-righteousness is red
> As blood on all of them.'"

Then he called to his soul to return that he might bow his head in holier prayer, and earn a recompense of good. But it was not until the angel Faith had inspired him to look above, and the angel Love had baptized him with her tears, and he beheld Christ "with sorrow on His lips," that his soul was cleansed of the stain of self-righteousness.

This much is plain: the Cross is a guide-board, pointing us to Christ's righteousness. To what else does it point us, Mr. Riley? I turn now to one of the "Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone" poems (one of the early Hoosier dialect poems which secured for our bard national attention), entitled "The Hoss." It is permeated with a delicious whimsical

humor. The whole thing is a panegyric on the horse, and is in no sense meant to be a religious poem; yet one verse of it runs as follows:

> "Some calls the hoss 'a pore dumb brute,'
> And yit, like Him who died fer you,
> I say, as I theyr charge refute,
> 'Fergive; they know not what they do!'"

The way is pointed there unmistakably plainly: forgiveness of injuries. That is what Christ had preached in His life: "Bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you." And when the malice of His enemies had compassed what it sought, when they were nailing His left hand fast to the Cross, He pushed His right hand up among His murderers and prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." His example has made His teaching forever luminous. He has shown me how to suffer, even when I suffer through the fault of others. When His cup of agony was so full that it drowned the brim, he made an excuse for the cruel malice of His enemies.

The man who prays for his enemies will have the enmity taken out of his own heart; they may hate him still; but he will have no spitefulness in his heart for them. Lord, help us, for Thy sake, for the

sake of those we seek to win, and for the sake of these poor wandering souls of ours, to pay more heed to this way to which the guide-board of the Cross points. For "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Further, the Cross points out the way of sacrifice for the sake of others. Thus in Riley's dialect Christmas poem "Them Old Cheery Words," a poem in which subtle humor and pathos are blent like bells of sweet accord, we have the children gathering home for Christmas, and "Mother" comforting and helping "Pap," dressing the wound he received in the war, and reading to him the newspapers put on file while he was with Sherman:

> "Sometimes he'd git het up some.—
> 'Boys,' he'd say, 'and you girls, too,
> Chris'mus is about to come;
> So, as you've a right to do,
> *Celebrate* it! Lots has died,
> Same as Him they crucified,
> That you might be happy here.'"

Sacrifice for others—that is the key-note of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As one life-cell is lost that another may live and grow; as the blossom is sacrificed for the coming fruit; as the mountains are

made poor to enrich the valleys; as the soldier gives himself for a principle, and a reformer for a cause, and a mother for her child, so the Cross of Christ points out to us the great truth that we also ought to lay down our lives for others—not in the degree and way in which Jesus laid down His as an expiation, but as a service, a devotion, a consecration.

> ". . . Lots has died,
> Same as Him they crucified,
> That you might be happy here."

The same thought is expressed, no less emphatically because incidentally, in one of the poems which Mr. Riley wrote on Abraham Lincoln. He always had a great love for Lincoln, and the burden of this poem is to describe the great Emancipator's life as a peaceful one. What a life that was! He desired to toil and rest, and read loved books beside the cabin fire, and listen to the low of pastured herds and the rhythmic blows of woodman's ax, and dream his heroic dreams. Ah,

> "A peaceful life! . . . They haled him even
> As One was haled
> Whose open palms were nailed toward Heaven
> When prayers nor aught availed.

> And lo, he paid the selfsame price
> To lull a nation's awful strife
> And will us, through the sacrifice
> Of self, his peaceful life."

This points me to two different facts: First, the awfulness of human sin. An ancient idealist said: "O Virtue, if thou wert to become incarnate, all men would worship thee." Yet, history shows that the world has never had anything better than contumely and scorn and hate and torment for its redeemers. Every reform has had to fight its way. Every movement for the amelioration of human conditions has been stained with blood. And when Virtue became incarnate, men hounded Him to Calvary. That was sin at its climax. And the virus which at its fullest development hailed Him

> "Whose open palms were nailed toward Heaven
> When prayers nor aught availed,"

is in the heart of every man. The Cross is a terrible manifestation of human sin.

But the other thing which I had in mind is hinted at in these words:

> "And will us, through the sacrifice
> Of self, his peaceful life."

Though Christ's life outwardly was a troubled one,

with tempestuous waves breaking over it all the time, yet His inner life was a sea of glass—the great calm always there. Even when He was dogged through the streets of Jerusalem by the bloodhounds of pharisaic hate, their tongues thirsting for His blood, He turned to His disciples and offered them, as a last legacy, His peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." That which He possessed He was able to bestow. The peace of reconciliation with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and the peace of conscious fellowship with God resulting from a living union with Christ the Savior, I claim as mine this Passion Week.

The Cross has been mentioned only incidentally in all the poems from which I have quoted up to this time. I now turn to one of which it is the theme. This one is called "The Christ," and consists of only eight lines with a single rhyme throughout, as follows:

"'Father!' (so The Word) He cried,—
'Son of Thine, and yet denied;
By my brothers dragged and tried,
Scoffed and scourged, and crucified,
With a thief on either side—
Brothers mine, alike belied,
Arms of mercy open wide,
Father! Father!' So He died."

Nimbly do we follow this pointing of the guide-board of the Cross, for three times in the eight lines of this poem is the word "Father" used. In His speech and in His life Christ was constantly trying to make men understand the Fatherhood of God. But it is in His death that we reach the very sun-kissed summit of His mountain revelation of God. When men ask me how I can believe that God is good in spite of all the stress and strife and struggle and bloodshed in this cruel old world of ours, my answer always is couched in one word: "Jesus!" His sensitive soul felt the jar and jangle and discord as I can never feel it. He saw suffering innocence, and Himself, being innocent, was

". . . dragged and tried,
Scoffed and scourged, and crucified,"

yet He knew that love lived in it all, even as the rainbow lives in the rain, and

"'Father! Father!' So He died."

This also is the crowning revelation of the love of God; for, as Saint Paul says, "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that Christ died for us."

So ends Riley's doctrine concerning the Cross. Not very much, is it? And yet, what more is there

to be said? He has preached no doctrine of finality concerning the full meaning of the Cross—and no man can do that. Some people have insisted on analyzing the Cross until they have made infidels by the thousands; they seem not to know that some things have to be felt. And some others have, with their "clear views," hacked the Cross into splinters. But, oh, the Cross is God's heart! We bend our intellects in lowliest reverence and worship before it; we accept its inspiration, we feel its passion, we lay our aching lives upon its infinite mystery, and find blessed rest and peace. We thank God for the old, old truth which Riley expresses in his quaint, homely way:

"Christ 'died fer you.'"

CHAPTER VII

Sin

GREAT literature deals with great themes. As nothing can be greater in the annals of battles than Waterloo or the Marne, so nothing can furnish a greater theme for masters in literature than the defeat of humanity; and humanity's Waterloo is sin. Sin opens wide to our gaze the ruin of man; and, beholding the ruin, we get an idea of his greatness. Sin reveals the highest and deepest relations of human life. Sin gives birth to tragedy, and tragedy holds evermore the unwavering gaze of mankind. And since sin is the greatest theme, the great writers always gravitate to it. You hear the wail of this disaster through all the writings of Sophocles. Juvenal's caustic satire discloses the festering sore of Roman life. Shakespeare and Goethe could find no theme adequate to their genius but sin. Dante built his Inferno upon it. Milton could not justify his genius, except as he dealt with "Man's first disobedience." The art of Hawthorne and Hugo and

George Eliot deals fundamentally with this haunting mystery of the human soul. All literature that is profoundly true pays attention to this deep reality.

The reason why great poets, novelists and dramatists always strike down into the sinfulness of man to find material for an ever-young appeal is because the moral judgment of men recognizes man as a sinful being. There is a general and deep-rooted feeling that man is failing to fulfill his destiny. If this is true in general, it is intensified manyfold when it becomes personal. Conscience is always alarming us about sin. Even when the individual laughs at the Church's earnestness about it, and smilingly speaks of his own sin as a sort of immaturity or huge joke, still his conscience condemns his wrong deeds and the character from which the wrong deeds spring. This is the teaching of Riley's poem "We Are Not Always Glad When We Smile." Though we may deceive the world into believing that we could not laugh in a happier way, yet down in the depths of the soul there is an ache and a moan that no one knows of save ourselves. And as the rainbow may live in the rain, so also there may be a smile in the eyes while a tempest of pain rages in the heart. But the inaudible, accusing voice of con-

science convinces us that while we may hide our sin from the knowledge of our fellows, yet it is plain in the sight of the Lord. Therefore, the poem concludes with these words:

"We are not always glad when we smile!—
But the conscience is quick to record,
All the sorrow and sin
We are hiding within
Is plain in the sight of the Lord:
And ever, O ever, till pride
And evasion shall cease to defile
The sacred recess
Of the soul, we confess
We are not always glad when we smile."

This common moral judgment of men which conveys a positive implication as to the general sinfulness finds expression through many mediums. Philosophy has always grappled it with ungloved earnestness. The religions of the world have all beheld it as a black cloud; and because no Sun of Righteousness has risen upon their horizon with healing in his beams sufficient to scatter the cloud, it has not only interposed itself between them and heaven, but has also cast a dark, dank shadow over the earth. The governments of mankind unite in testifying that sin is an ancient and ever-present fact. Experience has taught them that they must

reckon on the commission of crime, and they have provided penalties and created reformatory institutions accordingly.

Observations by any one, anywhere, anytime, will confirm this verdict handed down by the common moral judgment of men. In "A Song of the New Year," James Whitcomb Riley expresses the conviction that sin is the implacable foe of peace. He says that as he listened to the bells at midnight ring in the New Year, above the clanging chorus he seemed to hear a band of angels singing:

> "'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
> And the misery and sin,
> That the dawning of the morrow
> May in peace be ushered in.'"

And thinking of the trials of the departed years, and of the pleasures and hopes that had blossomed but now were withered and dead, he lifted his eyes toward Heaven; and while he prayed with trembling lips he received assurance that if sin and shame were rung out, the New Year would be ushered in in peace:

> "And like a ghost of music
> Slowly whispered—lowly sung—
> Came the echo pure and holy
> In the happy angel tongue:

'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
And the misery and sin,
And the dawn of every morrow
Will in peace be ushered in.'"

Riley is right again. It is sin that banishes peace, and fills the world with wars and bloodshed, and causes the history of mankind to be written as it were with the point of the sword rather than with the point of the pen. It is sin that is the cause of injustice, inequality, oppression and "man's inhumanity to man." It is sin that withers youthhood and maidenhood. It is sin that breaks up former happy homes, and tramples God's holy thoughts of fraternity into the mire of hell.

But

"Sinners allus suffers some,"

as Riley says in his quaint, homely style in his rather long and subtly humorous dialect poem, "Fessler's Bees."

"Sinners allus suffers some,
And *old Fessler's* reck'nin' come!
That-air man to-day is jes'
Like the grass 'at Scriptur' says
Cometh up, and then turns in
And jes' gits cut down ag'in!"

That poem has humor in it, but not those six lines. They are too tragically true to be funny. Sinners must be warned. God is not to be mocked. We shall reap what we sow. In the order which God has established, penalty for wrong-doing is self-executing. It is natural for retribution to follow sin. Both the nature of man and the world, as well as the Holy Scriptures emphasize and re-emphasize the doctrine that God has appointed various evils for the sinner to follow his sin.

"Sinners allus suffers some."

Sometimes the penalty is so apparent to the world that it resembles

". . . the grass 'at Scriptur' says
Cometh up, and then turns in
And jes' gits cut down ag'in."

But with all the sense of guilt, the condemnation of conscience, remorse, is by no means the least element in penalty that follows in the wake of sin. It may be that the sinner is too shallow, or his heart too hardened, to permit of the presence of remorse as an element in his punishment for sin. Nevertheless that it is normal for man to pronounce

judgment upon his own conduct, and for the wilful sinner to be "dogged by that blood-hound Remorsefulness," is the plain teaching of that interesting narrative poem of Riley's entitled "George Mullen's Confession," a poem so full of pathos that you can squeeze the tears out of it with one hand. Our poet makes George Mullen start his confession by saying:

"For the sake of guilty conscience, and the heart that ticks the time
Of the clockworks of my nature, I desire to say that I'm
A weak and sinful creature, as regards my daily walk
The last five years and better."

And he goes on to say that he always was hard, and full of pride, and "onry," and stiff, and stubborn, and had an awful temper. But he fell in love with a dear gentle girl, who in a marvelous way tamed the wild animal of his nature. When he asked her to marry him, her parents strenuously objected, on the ground that he was not their idea of a son-in-law. But when, in intense anger, he started away from their home, the daughter, his sweetheart, went with him, though her father yelled like a madman that henceforth she was no child of his. They lived happily together for some months and years, and their happiness was intensified when little Grace

came to brighten their home with her winning ways and sweet baby language.

Then one day his wife's father wrote her a message, and all that he said in it was: "Annie Mullen, come and see your mother die." In his "Confession," George says:

"I saw the slur intended—why I fancied I could see
The old man shoot that insult like a poison dart at me;
And in that heat of passion I swore an inward oath
That if Annie pleased her father she could never please us both.

"I watched her—dark and sullen—as she hurried on her shawl;
I watched her—calm and cruel, though I saw her tear-drops fall;
I watched her—cold and heartless, though I heard her moaning call
For mercy from high Heaven—and I smiled throughout it all.

"Why even when she kissed me, and her tears were on my brow,
As she murmured, 'George, forgive me—I must go to mother now!'
Such hate there was within me that I answered not at all,
But calm, and cold and cruel, I smiled throughout it all."

But when little Grace came and kissed him good-by, and told him to kiss her "Muvver" too, he sort of relented. Yet when they had driven away, and

he was left alone to ponder that last insult the old man had given him, he mouthed his wrongs

"Till the wild beast in my nature was raging in the den—
With no one now to quell it, and I wrote a letter then
Full of hissing things, and heated with so hot a heat of hate
That my pen flashed out black lightning at a most terrific rate.

"I wrote that 'she had wronged me when she went away from me—
Though to see her dying mother 'twas her father's victory,
And a woman that could waver when her husband's pride was rent
Was no longer worthy of it.' And I shut the house and went."

He had an awful exile. He wandered to California, and lived a wild and vicious life. He wandered over trackless plains and mountains, and suffered tortures at the hands of Indians. He says:

"I could tell of gloomy forests howling wild with threats of death;
I could tell of fiery deserts that have scorched me with their breath;
I could tell of wretched outcasts by the hundreds, great and small,
And could claim the nasty honor of the greatest of them all.

"I could tell of toil and hardship; and of sickness and disease,
And hollow-eyed starvation, but I tell you, friend, that these
Are trifles in comparison with what a fellow feels
With that bloodhound, Remorsefulness, forever at his heels."

Truly life is hell when conscience gives place to

remorse. Riley rightly calls it a "blood-hound." The great Luther once described it as "a barking hell-hound, a monster vomiting fire, a raging fury, a tormenting devil."

Riley has an eery poem that he calls "The Lost Kiss" in which he represents a poet so absorbed in his writing that one day when his dear little girl came romping to him for a kiss,

> "Come rowdying up from her mother,
> And clamoring there at my knee
> For 'One 'ittle kiss for my dolly,
> And one 'ittle uzzer for me!'"

he impatiently scolded her, and sent her away. Time passes, but he can not forget. He stops a half-written poem to pray:

> "God, pity the heart that repelled her,
> And the cold hand that turned her away,
> And take, from the lips that denied her,
> This answerless prayer of to-day!
> Take, Lord, from my mem'ry forever
> That pitiful sob of despair,
> And the patter and trip of the little bare feet,
> And the one piercing cry on the stair!"

O the inaudible accusing voice of conscience! O the face drenched with a pitiless storm of tears or flushed with shame when no one is near to see! O

the bitter memories of the past! Cain heard the blood of Abel crying from the earth, and though no criminal law threatened death to murderers, yet his guilty conscience told him that men would like to kill him if they could. In his rugged Hoosier style Mr. Riley has written a poem which he calls "My Conscience." It is permeated with a delicious whimsical humor, but is absolutely true psychology:

"Sometimes my Conscience says, says he,
'Don't you know me?'
And I, says I, skeered through and through,
'Of course I do.
You air a nice chap ever' way,
I'm here to say!
You make me cry—you make me pray,
And all them good things thataway—
That is, at *night*. Where do you stay
Durin' the day?'

"And then my Conscience says, onc't more,
'You know me—shore?'
'Oh, yes,' says I, a-trimblin' faint,
'You're jes' a saint!
Your ways is all so holy-right,
I love you better ever' night
You come around,—tel plum daylight,
When you air out o' sight!'

"And then my Conscience sort o' grits
His teeth, and spits
On his hands and grabs, of course,
Some old remorse,

'And beats me with the big butt-end
O' *that* thing—tel my clostest friend
'Ud hardly know me. 'Now,' says he,
'Be keerful as you'd orto be
And *allus* think o' me!'"

Who of us has not gone through precisely that experience? Have we not been remorseful in the dark night, and forgetful of our vows in the daylight? And have we not seen Conscience spit on his hands, grit his teeth, and grab up some old remorse with which to club us?

But the most serious element in penalty for sin is the fact that God knows and cares and disapproves. God is unalterably opposed to sin. The sinner

"Insults his God,"

as Riley puts it in that bloodcurdling description of "An Assassin":

"Catlike he creeps along where ways are dim,
From covert unto covert's secrecy;
His shadow in the moonlight shrinks from him
And crouches warily.

He hugs strange envies to his breast, and nurses
Wild hatreds, till the murderous hand he grips
Falls, quivering with the tension of the curses
He launches from his lips.

Drenched in his victim's blood he holds high revel;
He mocks at justice, and in all men's eyes
Insults his God—and no one but the devil
Is sorry when he dies."

There is the natural history of sin: the microbe of sin is harbored in the heart before it breaks out in the deed of the hand. Murder is traced back to its birthplace; the heart that hugs strange envies and nurses wild hatreds. And when his devilish deed is done, bad as it all is, the worst thing about it is that he

"Insults his God."

Sometimes God's opposition to sin is spoken of as "indignation," "wrath," "hatred." But we must be careful not to invest them with the meaning which we give them when we use them to describe our human passion. For while God hates sin He still loves the sinner, and yearns to save him. In His disapproving love there is a grief, a sadness, a heart-break. Thus in "The Vision of Rabbi Ben Isaac" which our poet records, when he became alarmed at the stain of self-righteousness which he beholds upon his spirit as it approaches Heaven, he calls out for it to return to him:

"'Not so.' It answered, as in some surprise—
'The angel Faith has whispered "Look Above,"
And shading with her wings my dazzled eyes,
Points out the angel Love,

"'Who, weeping, bends above me, and her tears
Baptize me, and her sister Mercy trips
Along the golden clouds, and Christ appears
With sorrow on His lips.'"

Oh yes, dear poet, that is it: Divine love is wounded, weeping. Christ is sorrow-stricken when souls go astray. And surely there is no greater element in the punishment that comes upon the sinner than the disapproval of the God of Love.

There is still another element in penalty for sin: and that is that there are sufferings and losses which follow the sinner even after God has forgiven his sin. This is a lesson which our age needs to learn. The prodigal son went into the far country, and spent his substance in riotous living, and when he came back his father freely forgave him. But that prodigal son left with the swine in the far country some of the richest and highest possibilities of his life—and he never possessed them again. God will pardon all transgression and will cleanse from all sin; but He does not suspend the law of cause and effect, of seed and harvest. "He that soweth to the

flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." For example, witness the life of Luther Benson, the famous temperance orator. He was greatly admired by James Whitcomb Riley, who after reading his autobiography, wrote a poem on his life. And though he rejoices that his sins are now forgiven and a strength divine encircles him, yet since he had squandered so much of his life and usefulness in drunkenness, Mr. Riley speaks of him as a

> "Poor victim of that vulture curse
> That hovers o'er the universe,
> With ready talons quick to strike
> In every human heart alike,
> And cruel beak to stab and tear
> In virtue's vitals everywhere."

His iniquity has been forgiven, yet our poet says that looking through the open door of his sad life he can see only a broad landscape of misery; he sees the ruins of his younger years; he sees the father's shielding arm struck down. He goes on with the sad recital:

> "I see a happy home grow dark
> And desolate—the latest spark
> Of hope is passing in eclipse—
> The prayer upon a mother's lips
> Has fallen with her latest breath
> In ashes on the lips of death."

And no amount of agonizing prayer can ever recover those wasted years and that heart-broken mother. We must tell our generation that the man who is away from God for a single year or a single day must suffer an irreparable loss. How much better it would have been for Luther Benson and for all drunkards had they heeded the words of the Scripture: "Wine is a mocker," and if they had allowed it to "stagnate in the bowl" as Riley sang in that very early poem of his, "Job Work," when he was asked to "write a rhyme of the present time," and among other things he

> ". . . sang the joy that a noble boy
> Brings to a father's soul,
> Who lets the wine as a mocker shine
> Stagnated in the bowl."

There is another poem which he calls "A Simple Recipe," showing how "the right kind of a man can be made out of the right kind of a boy," which contains this straightforward exhortation to clean living and strict obedience to conscience:

> "Be clean—outside and in, and sweep
> Both hearth and heart and hold them bright;
> Wear snowy linen—aye, and keep
> Your *conscience* snowy-white."

The fact which gives to the idea of sin its most terrible significance is the tendency to permanence in its issues. There is a cumulative effect of sin in any sinning man or woman. There is a progression in sinfulness as there is in holiness. There is an increasing hardness of heart and an increasing deadness of conscience. And the awfully alarming thing about it is that by continued unwillingness to walk in the way of God the sinner may bring himself into that spiritual attitude, that fixed and permanent and final condition of soul where a change in his manner of life is impossible, because by his own choice he has made repentance impossible. But all sin, as such, necessarily involves the idea of suffering to the person who commits it; hence punishment, or suffering, as the natural consequence of selfishness, must exist as long as sin exists. Unless the grace of God, which is the only power effective in the overthrow of sin, is allowed to operate, punishment for sin will continue beyond the grave. That there will be a judgment in which each one will stand on his own personality and must answer to his own deeds is the thought which is set forth in Riley's "His Mother," where a mother is wailing for her boy whom she charges the "Law" with having killed.

Declaring that God did not apologize when He gave the boy to her, she warns those to whom she is talking to prepare for God's verdict at the final judgment:

"Simply, I make ready now
For *His* verdict.—*You* prepare—
You have killed us both—and how
Will you face us There?"

But suppose a man repents of his sin, as the prodigal son did of his—that is, he becomes conscious of sin, is heartily sorry for it, is conscious of better things, forms a resolution of repentance, abandons his life of sin, returns to God, confesses to Him without palliation and unreservedly consecrates himself to His service—what then? Suppose he offers Riley's "A Mortul Prayer":

"Oh! with the hand that tames the flood
And smooths the storm to rest,
Make ba'mmy dews of all the blood
That stormeth in my brest,
And so refresh my hart to bud
And bloom the loveliest.
Lull all the clammer of my soul
To silunce; bring release
Unto the brane still in controle
Of doubts; bid sin to cease,
And let the waves of pashun roll
And kiss the shores of peace."

Will God give heed to that repentance and to that "Mortul Prayer"? Yes, thank God. He will. A little while ago we quoted from Riley's poem on Luther Benson, showing the havoc wrought by sin; but we did not quote it all. Through the poet's eyes let us see the end:

"I see a penitent who reels,
And writhes, and clasps his hands, and kneels,
And moans for mercy for the sake
Of that fond heart he dared to break.

"And lo! as when in Galilee
A voice above the troubled sea
Commanded "Peace; be still!" the flood
That rolled in tempest-waves of blood
Within you, fell in calm so sweet
It ripples round the Saviour's feet;
And all your noble nature thrilled
With brightest hope and faith, and filled
Your thirsty soul with joy and peace
And praise to Him who gave release."

Yes, yes; it is Christ who gives release. Sin makes the fellowship with God for which we were created impossible. It does not change God; but it alters the relationship which exists between Him and us. But God stands ready to forgive us whenever in true repentance we seek His forgiveness. He does not absolutely wipe out the effects and results

of sin in the human life; but He does deliver the sinner from having his destiny decided by his guilt; He lifts the burden from the sinner's conscience; He removes the condemnation, and gives the sinner a new start in life under His own blessed influence. In "The Rainy Morning" Riley describes a dreary morning, with weeping clouds, and sighing winds, and writhing leaves. And then he tells how, as he stood bowed in a shower of tear drops, the splendor of the sun bent over him, and his tears, like the rain of morning, melted in mists of light. The whole poem is beautiful; but to my mind the stanza which originally concluded it is the best of all; for in it he says:

> "I do not know that the sermon
> Was meant for me alone,
> Tho' it seemed to me God spoke it
> In the faintest undertone.
> Yet this I know: when the spirit
> Is draped in the gloom of sin,
> That only the hand of the Master
> Can let the sunshine in."

Sin like a black cloud shuts the light of God's free grace out of man's life; but forgiveness banishes the cloud, and opens to the sinner the free action of God's grace.

"Only the hand of the Master
Can let the sunshine in."

When our conscience has aroused us, and clubbed us, and "that bloodhound, Remorsefulness," has dogged us, and we have been alarmed with the tragical consequences of sin, and especially so since we have "insulted God," and our "spirit is draped in the gloom of sin," and we have grown weak trying to find a way out of sin to salvation, and then we learn that the Cross of Christ points the way, how jubilantly do we take up "The Chant of the Cross-Bearing Child" (one of our bard's few negro dialect poems):

"I's nigh 'bout weak ez I mos' kin be,
Yit de Marstah call an' He say,—'You's free
Fo' ter 'cept dis cross, an' ter cringe yo' knee
To no n'er man in de worl' but Me!'"

Since we are free to accept the Cross, and with it salvation, joyfully do we accept it, and with deep contrition do we pray the opening line in "Kneeling with Herrick":

"Dear Lord, to Thee my knee is bent."

CHAPTER VIII

Riley's Doctrine of Immortality: An Easter Meditation

"IF a man die, shall he live again?" is the way an ancient poet expressed the question that pounds with an insistency and a persistency at more human hearts than any other question ever asked. It is the preacher's most popular theme. When I was pastor of Sewickley Church a few years ago, I submitted to the morning and evening congregations one Sunday a list of ten subjects for sermons, covering a wide range of interest; one was the alliterative slogan of the Sewickley Board of Trade, "Sewickley, Start Something"—that was sensational, at least latently so; another was "The Uses of Money"—that was practical; another was Dante's "Divine Comedy"—that was cultural; another was "What Do We Mean by Conversion?"—that was doctrinal. These are only samples. There were ten subjects given and unostentatiously mixed in with the others was the

question of Job: "If a man die, shall he live again?" The people were instructed to mark the five in which they were most interested. The membership of the church then numbered nearly a thousand. It was the last Sunday of May. The attendance was excellent. The congregation included all kinds of people; young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. The referendum vote was scattered over the whole ten subjects. The one receiving the smallest vote was, "John Knox, the Reformer," securing only twenty-one per cent. of the votes cast. They ranged from that over nine of the subjects up to the "Amusement Question," which got sixty-nine per cent. of the votes—the largest of all with one single exception. And that exception was, "If a man die, shall he live again?" seventy-six out of every hundred people declaring more interest in that than in any other question asked.

That congregation is typical of the human race. Does death end all? Shall we see our loved ones again? Eternity comes on; after death, what? These are ubiquitous, irrepressible questions. Death compels man to think of what follows, for it will not leave man alone. Sooner or later each one feels that James Whitcomb Riley, in his "Lines on the

Death of Little Mahala Ashcraft," has given expression to the sorrow we feel when the grim messenger has invaded our home:

"'Little Haly! Little Haly!' cheeps the robin in the tree;
'Little Haly!' sighs the clover, 'Little Haly!' moans the bee;
'Little Haly! Little Haly!' calls the killdeer at twilight;
And the katydids and crickets hollers 'Haly!' all the night."

And so it sobs through the whole of this irresistible elegy. The sorrowing pulse of nature bids the poet voice his emotion, and ours, in accordant rhythm. The result is an exquisite blending of the homespun phrase and the lyric feeling, possessed of a simple directness approaching the feeling of Greek poetry. For the delicacy and sentiment of Riley perfectly match the naturalness and charm of the honey-lipped Theocritus. Why? Because nothing human is alien to Riley. His humanity is not modeled after the fashion-plate standards; it is spacious, robust, somewhat Elizabethan.

But not only does he give voice to humanity's sorrow at the havoc wrought by death. He changes Job's question into an affirmation, and sings of the immortal life beyond the grave. Take that rather long narrative poem, "He Called Her In." It is a story of sustained interest which our gentle Hoosier

poet puts into the mouth of a motherless little girl, sad, dark, eery. He makes her say that one day while she was lying

> ". . . shut all alone in grasses high,
> Looking straight up in God's great lonesome sky
> And coaxing Mother to smile back on me,"

another little girl also motherless, came out from a near-by pleasant-seeming home, and by winsome sweetness won her confidence and love:

> "At once I loved her as the leaves love dew
> In midmost summer when the days are new."

They played together in perfect happiness, mingling as the shine and shade,

> ". . . till a harsh voice broke upon
> Our happiness. She, startled as a fawn,
> Cried, 'Oh, 'tis Father!' all the blossoms gone
> From out her cheeks as those from out her grasp.—
> Harsher the voice came:—She could only gasp
> Affrightedly, 'Good-by!—good-by! good-by!'"

And the little girl stood alone, with wet eyes, repeating over and over:

> "'He called her in from me and shut the door!'"

She was so very lonely. She thought that "no little sallow star, alone in all a world of twilight, e'er had known such utter loneliness."

"'He called her in from me and shut the door!'"

Then one day she went out again among the green grasses, and gathered up and kissed the blossoms that her little friend had tossed aside. Creeping up to her home, she saw no sign of her, nor heard her rippling laugh; but she found the window-blinds drawn, and caught

"A sound as though a strong man bowed his head
And sobbed alone—unloved—uncomforted!—
And then straightway before
My tearless eyes, all vividly, was wrought
A vision that is with me evermore:—
A little girl that lies asleep, nor hears
Nor heeds not any voice nor fall of tears.—
And I sit singing o'er and o'er and o'er,
'God called her in from him and shut the door!'"

So ends this narrative poem—a story in which we discern the image of a heightened and intenser world. Is it not the interpretation of experience?

Not unlike this poem is the one which Mr. Riley wrote upon the sudden death of "Little Marjorie," the four-year-old daughter of his friend, William C. Bobbs. "Where is little Marjorie?" is the sorrow-laden question which our bard hears in the robin's call, and the bluebird's note, and the soft syllables of her old playmate, the rain, on the window-

pane, and the spring voices everywhere: "Where is little Marjorie?" And he answers with confidence:

"Oh, in high security
She is hidden from the reach
Of all voices that beseech:
She is where no troubled word,
Sob or sigh is ever heard,
Since God whispered tenderly—
'Where is little Marjorie?'"

Once Mr. Riley saw in the *New York Sun* a poem of three verses, entitled, "Doubt," by an unknown author. In imitation of its style, and in reply to its skepticism, he wrote one entitled, "Faith," which is as follows:

"The sea was breaking at my feet,
And looking out across the tide,
Where placid waves and heaven meet,
I thought me of the Other Side,

"For on the beach on which I stood
Were wastes of sand, and wash, and roar,
Low clouds, and gloom, and solitude,
And wrecks and ruins—nothing more.

"'O, tell me if beyond the sea
A heavenly port there is!' I cried,
And back the echoes laughingly
'There is! there is!' replied."

When Myron W. Reed, a well-known preacher, died, his intimate friend, James Whitcomb Riley,

subtly characterized his life, and affirmed his own faith, in "The Onward Trail," the final stanza of which reads:

> "So, never parting word or cry:—
> We feel, with him, that by and by
> Our onward trails will meet and then
> Merge and be ever one again."

The same thought is expressed in the beautiful sonnet which Mr. Riley wrote on the passing of his "master-friend," the famous artist, Samuel Richards, who died "At His Wintry Tent" (Denver, Colorado). The closing lines describe the artist thus:

> "The laughing light of faith still in his eye
> As, at his wintry tent, pitched at the end
> Of life, he gaily called to me, 'Good night,
> Old friend, good night—for there is no good-by.'"

I remember once, after I had delivered my lecture-recital on "James Whitcomb Riley, the Typical American Poet of This Generation," before the Pittsburgh preachers' meeting, one of the ministers said to me: "When my son met his tragic and untimely death the one thing outside the Bible that brought most comfort to my broken heart was James Whitcomb Riley's poem, 'Away.'" Let me quote it

in full here. It may bring comfort to other bereaved ones:

"I can not say, and I will not say
That he is dead.—He is just away!

"With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,
He has wandered into an unknown land,

"And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be, since he lingers there.

"And you—O you, who the wildest yearn
For the old-time step and glad return,—

"Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of There as the love of Here;

"And loyal still, as he gave the blows
Of his warrior-strength to his country's foes.—

"Mild and gentle, as he was brave,—
When the sweetest love of his life he gave

"To simple things:—where the violets grew
Blue as the eyes they were likened to,

"The touches of his hands have strayed
As reverently as his lips have prayed:

"When the little brown thrush that harshly chirred
Was dear to him as the mocking-bird;

"And he pitied as much as a man in pain
A writhing honey-bee wet with rain.

"Think of him still as the same, I say:
He is not dead—he is just away!"

What a rich union of mellow thought and melodious verse that is!

Though these poems embody what Mr. Riley has thought and felt, yet he speaks for us all. His poetry finds us because it phrases what we have ourselves perceived and felt. He expresses the universal because the universal is within him.

While he was still in his twenties—and a sign-painter—James Whitcomb Riley wrote "Our Little Girl." According to the "Notes" at the end of the volume of his *Complete Works* (edited by Edmund Henry Eitel), the inspiration of this poem was the following notice which appeared in *The Hancock Democrat:*

"Died—Minnie, infant daughter of William and Catherine Crider, Tuesday, Dec. 5, 1876, at Franklin, Ind. In her last moments she said: 'O, Dod, I tan't stan' dis.'"

It consists of three stanzas. The first one reads as follows:

"Her heart knew naught of sorrow
  Nor the vaguest taint of sin—
'Twas an ever-blooming blossom
  Of the purity within;
And her hands knew only touches
  Of the mother's gentle care,
And the kisses and caresses
  Through the interludes of prayer."

As the poem now stands, Mr. Riley has written an entirely new final stanza for it. But I like the one which originally closed it, and which fits in with our theme so well, that I am going to give it to you here:

"And yet she failed and faltered;
And though tears are in our eyes,
We smile to think her spirit
Went lisping to the skies;
For we know—in Christ believing—
Lips are ripest for His kiss,
When in simplest faith they murmur,
'O, Dod, I tan't stan' dis.'"

That is good reasoning. It is sound philosophy to say that man's innate sense of justice, set over against the sufferings, the cruelties, the inequalities, the injustice of this present life, argues strongly for immortality. Man so emphatically loves justice that he can have no doubt concerning the justice of God. Indeed we can not hold a true conception of God without thinking of Him as just. Another life is demanded that the unjustness of this life may be straightened out. The innocent little child, whose heart had never known "the vaguest taint of sin," suffered so much that she told God she could not stand it. But

". . . we know—in Christ believing—
Lips are ripest for His kiss,
When in simplest faith they murmur,
'Oh, Dod, I tan't stan' dis.'"

The same thought concludes "The Happy Little Cripple." I shall not take the space here to tell the story of the poem for—well, everybody has read that exquisitely cunning blend of wit and pathos and philosophy. But the little cripple, who has had such a hard time here on earth, closes his speech by talking about Heaven:

"'Cause all the little childerns there's so straight an' strong an' fine,
They's nary angel 'bout the place with 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'"

Mr. Riley's verses have such a universality of appeal that we can hardly think of their having been written to fit some individual case. "Little David" was a crippled boy with big ambitions who lived next door to our poet in Lockerbie Street, Indianapolis. When the brave little fellow was gone, Mr. Riley wrote to his mother the following lines:

"The mother of the little boy that sleeps
Has blest assurance, even as she weeps:
She knows her little boy now has no pain—
No further ache, in body, heart or brain;

> All sorrow is lulled for him—all distress
> Passed into utter peace and restfulness.—
> All health that heretofore has been denied
> All happiness, all hope, and all beside
> Of childish longing, now he clasps and keeps
> In voiceless joy—the little boy that sleeps."

Though God is just, how great the injustice and inequality of this world! Lowell spoke about truth being forever on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne. There is far more than mere poetry in Lowell's lines. Too often truth is on the scaffold, or is crushed to earth; and though another poet says "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again," yet many people have waited a whole lifetime and have not seen her rise. Many a time we see Vice riding along empurpled thoroughfares of royalty in a limousine while Virtue, footsore and ragged, tramps the dusty highways of life. It is only a belief in an eternity where justice shall triumph over injustice and where inequalities shall be straightened out that makes this present life endurable.

This is "A Life Lesson," which Mr. Riley fain would teach us. He assures the little girl whose doll, and tea-set, and playhouses have been broken that "childish troubles will soon pass by." And the schoolgirl, whose slate has been broken, and whose

glad wild ways are gone he promises that "life and love will soon come by." And then the final encouragement:

"There! little girl, don't cry!
They have broken your heart, I know;
And the rainbow gleams
Of your youthful dreams
Are things of the long ago;
But heaven holds all for which you sigh—
There! little girl; don't cry!"

Upon the death of T. C. Philips, "an editor of state-wide name and influence," Mr. Riley composed a sonnet, in which he praised the noble and unselfish work which his venerable friend had done, opposing Wrong and cheering Right, yet always concealing his own inward agony,

"Until the Master, leaning from His throne,
Heard some soul wailing in an undertone,
And bending lower down, discovered thee,
And clasped thy weary hand within His own
And lifted thee to rest eternally."

When Katie Beecher, "a bright and promising child," died, Mr. Riley was moved to write

"Over the eyes of gladness
The lids of sorrow fall,"

in which he depicted the sorrow of the parents on

account of their loss. Katie was one of twin daughters. See how our poet's unfathomable pathos, and brotherly pity, and spontaneous sympathy express themselves here:

"Two buds on the bough in the morning—
Twin buds in the smiling sun,
But the frost of death has fallen
And blighted the bloom of one.

"One leaf of life still folded
Has fallen from the stem,
Leaving the symbol teaching
There still are two of them,—

"For though—through Time's gradations,
The *living* bud may burst,—
The *withered* one is gathered,
And blooms in Heaven first."

How often, oh, how often "the frost of death" blights the bloom of life! But Riley teaches that the blighted bud shall bloom in Heaven. That is sound philosophy. Another world is needed to bring man's imperfections to perfection, and his incompleteness to completion. We feel that we are just beginning to live when it is time to die. The thinker has not got beneath the surface of the profound problems that have engaged his attention. The statesman has not done a tithe of the construc-

tive work for human brotherhood that he longs to do. The scholar has not given expression to a thousandth part of the thoughts that surge within him like the booming of the midnight sea upon the rocks. The artist feels that the paintings he has produced are only the prophecy of what he could do if he had the time for the development of the powers within him. The prophet still has his eye on the future, and yearns like the mighty ocean tide to bring his message to mankind, when the "frost of death" falls on him. The saint keeps struggling up the steep mountain of goodness, and struggling up, and struggling up, and no matter how good he may be when the sun of his life's day is set, he still sees far above his reach the snow-white peak of holiness of character which his feet have never scaled. But,

> "The *withered* one is gathered,
> And blooms in Heaven first."

Mr. Riley was a great admirer of John Boyle O'Reilly, and on his death exclaimed:

> "Dead? this peerless man of men—
> Patriot, Poet, Citizen!
> Dead? and ye weep where he lies
> Mute, with folded eyes!"

Further on in the poem he answers his own question:

> "'Tis promotion that has come
> Thus upon him. Stricken dumb
> Be your moanings dolorous!
> God knows what he does."

Eight years later, when writing on the passing of Claude Matthews, he again voices this idea of death as a promotion:

> "Faith sees him raised still higher, through our tears,
> By this divine promotion of his death."

I like that! Only promoted! What a kindling thought it is! It calls out the noblest, holiest activities of which we are capable. It infuses new motives into all our work. It exalts our thoughts, strengthens our wills, wings our imaginations, refines our judgments. It widens the horizon of our sympathies, and concentrates our purposes. It fires our ambitions and stimulates us to project more colossal enterprises. It makes us more pure, more patient, more powerful, more peaceful. It engenders generosity but not selfishness; love but not lust; tenderness but not touchiness. It soothes the sorrowing spirit and inflames the flagging energies. It

teaches us that perfection is the end of persistent personal life. Only promoted!

One more stanza shall I quote in this connection—the last one in the poem Mr. Riley wrote when he lost to sight his choice friend, Charles H. Philips. The stanza carries to a still higher level the thought I have been developing here:

> "So even thou hast gained
> The victory God-given—
> Yea, as our cheeks are stained
> With tears, and our souls pained
> And mute, thou has attained
> Thy high reward in Heaven."

James Whitcomb Riley has learned the secret of endearing himself to a wider range of American humanity than any other American poet. He is essentially the poet laureate of our common life. Though he is best known as the master who subdued the Hoosier dialect to music, yet, as has been seen in many of the quotations in this study, he has written many poems in literary English which reveal a subtle insight and generous sympathy. They are never commonplace nor uninspired, but spirited and full of the sap of life. He has woven some pieces of

iridescent word-work, following the pattern made visible to his inward eye, over which a Tennyson or a Browning would have felt a thrill of joy. One which is a perfect gem, both in substance and style, is that "Hymn Exultant" of the lyric mood, written "for Easter." It is as follows:

"Voice of Mankind, sing over land and sea—
  Sing, in this glorious morn!
The long, long night is gone from Calvary—
  The cross, the thong and thorn;
The sealed tomb yields up its saintly guest,
No longer to be burdened and oppressed.

"Heart of Mankind, thrill answer to His own,
  So human, yet divine!
For earthly love He left His heavenly throne,
  For love like thine and mine—
For love of us, as one might kiss a bride,
His lifted lips touched death's, all satisfied.

"Soul of Mankind, He wakes—He lives once more!
  O soul, with heart and voice
Sing! sing!—the stone rolls chorus from the door—
  Our Lord stands forth.—Rejoice!
Rejoice, O garden-land of song and flowers;
Our King returns to us, forever ours!"

There is the final argument for the doctrine of immortality. Jesus said there was a life beyond the grave. He declared His own resurrection, and He

made good the prophecy. I remember when I was a student in the University of Chicago Divinity School, Dean Shailer Matthews one day said before the class: "The resurrection of Jesus is a fact demonstrated by science." One of the students knit his eyebrows, and took exception to the Dean's word (and the Dean, by the way, had no special ambition to be counted orthodox). But in reply, Doctor Matthews said, in effect: "I do not mean that it is proved by the science of chemistry, for chemistry has nothing at all to do with it. I do not mean that it is proved by the science of biology, for it is not a biological question. But I do insist that the resurrection of Jesus has been demonstrated by the only science that has aught to do with it, that is, the science of history!" And he was right.

Take the testimony of Saint Paul, indisputable, compact, convincing. I shall not take up the space here by transcribing it; read it for yourself in the first letter he wrote to the Corinthians, the fifteenth chapter. Or take the fact of the Church; it has been built on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Or consider the fact that the apostles rather than to deny the resurrection were willing to suffer the most excruciating torture and die the most igno-

minious death. Or look at the historic fact of a change in the day of rest and worship; once it was the seventh day, then something happened to change it, all of a sudden, to the first day. Peter of Alexandria (A. D. 300) sums it all up when he says: "We keep the Lord's Day as a day of joy because of Him who rose thereon." The resurrection of Jesus holds as large a place in the Christian creed as the creation of the world out of nothing held in the Jewish belief. To the Jew the Sabbath commemorated deliverance from Egyptian bondage. To the Christian Sunday commemorates deliverance from the bondage of sin and death. Thus every week has its Easter. And Easter is the last historical fact I shall mention, for something happened on a spring Sunday about nineteen hundred years ago to cause a group of people to celebrate the day in succeeding years. As a hymn is sung by a great outdoor congregation, first those around the leader singing it, and then others taking it up farther out, and on, until the whole grove resounds with its melody, so the Easter "Hymn Exultant" was sung first in Palestine of Judea by a few; then others joined in; then it leaped across the Hellespont, and reverberated

through Asia Minor; then it sung its way around the Mediterranean Sea; then it became the marching anthem to which civilization kept step; soon its swelling breath filled the sails of ships and drove them across the Atlantic Ocean. And if one could have been carried on the wings of the morning this springtime he would have seen five hundred and fifty millions of people celebrating this Easter—that reaches in an unbroken line from the resurrection of Jesus. Why? Because

> "The sealed tomb yields up its saintly guest,
> No longer to be burdened and oppressed."
>
> "Soul of Mankind, He wakes—He lives once more!
> O soul, with heart and voice
> Sing! sing!—the stone rolls chorus from the door—
> Our Lord stands forth.—Rejoice!
> Rejoice, O garden-land of song and flowers;
> Our King returns to us, forever ours!"

Blessed relief! glorious joy! inestimable triumph! What Cicero called "a mere conjecture" is made to us an assured fact, a blessed divine reality by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Here is the answer to humanity's quest for "The Beautiful City" of which Riley speaks. How musical his verse, and as true as musical:

"The Beautiful City! Forever
Its rapturous praises resound;
We fain would behold it—but never
A glimpse of its glory is found;
We slacken our lips at the tender
White breasts of our mothers to hear
Of its marvelous beauty and splendor;—
We see—but the gleam of a tear!"

And then he goes on to tell us how we never grow tired of the story that has been common to all nations "from the earliest lisp of the world." He records our search everywhere for the Beautiful City—but it constantly evades us. We lean from the mountain, looking for it, only to have our vision blurred by the dust of earth. We lean from the mast, only to have the glare of the ocean blur our brain. "We kneel in dim fanes," but the tumultuous roll of the organ dies away, and looking aloft our eyes reach only "where the painter has dabbled a saint overhead." Must our quest always be in vain? Nay; listen to the sure confidence of our poet, based on the resurrection of Jesus:

"The Beautiful City! O mortal,
Fare hopefully on in thy quest,
Pass down through the green grassy portal
That leads to the Valley of Rest;

There first passed the One who, in pity
Of all thy great yearning, awaits
To point out the Beautiful City,
And loosen the trump at the gates."

That is why Easter is the second birthday of the human race. It is the birthday of hope in the human heart. For the opened tomb in the Garden has become the telescope through which we behold the Elysian fields of our God.

Therefore, as our poet said when his old teacher and friend, Captain Lee O. Harris, died, so we also say concerning our departed loved one:

"O say not he is dead,
The friend we honored so;
Lift up a grateful voice instead
And say: He lives, we know—
We know it by the light
Of his enduring love
Of honor, valor, truth and right,
And man, and God above."

"What will Heaven be like?" is an ever-recurring question. Mr. Riley once wrote in prose as follows:

"Of course, one can speculate as to what Heaven will be like. It doesn't do any harm to speculate upon the sort of place that Heaven will be and the sort of life that is lived there. The field isn't limited

—you can imagine that anything can take place there; anything, anything!"

Jesus has made one thing certain, namely, that the natural craving of our heart shall be realized in Heaven; for when He was talking to His disciples, about gathering them into the Father's house of many mansions, He said: "If it were not so, I would have told you." How many questions that simple statement answers! Will it be like home? Home at its best? when the children "gathered home" for Christmas. Therefore Riley recalls "Them old cheery words" that

> "Pap he allus ust to say,
> 'Chris'mus comes but onc't a year!'"

And the poem ends by telling how "Pap" has crossed over to the better land, and

> "*Allus* Chris'mus *There*.—And here
> 'Chris'mus comes but onc't a year!'"

In "Last Words" our poet assures us that:

> "The sun that cheers our pathway here
> Shall beam upon us there."

That is a thoroughly satisfying promise; for the resurrection of Christ proclaims not simply that we

pass into another life, but that that life transcends this life as light transcends gloom. When immortality was bestowed upon Achilles he sighed again for earth. But Jesus Christ has made it "gain" to die.

That is why Riley in the climax of his lines "On a Dead Babe," exclaims in his familiar Hoosier style:

"I can not weep fer *thee*."

Why? Because, as he tells us in that other sweet little poem, "Baby's Dying":

"Baby's dying,
Do not stir—
Let her pure life lightly swim
Through the sighing
Lips of her—
Out from us and up to Him."

That is emphatically one of the differences the coming of Christ has made. The pagan world always believed in immortality, and sometimes seems to have had a vague notion that ultimately it should come into the presence of the gods. But the change wrought by Christ makes immortality become ultimate oneness with God even as Christ is one. The saved shall see Christ face to face—as Riley puts it in the closing stanza of "When Bessie Died":

"We writhed in prayer unsatisfied;
We begged of God, and He did smile
In silence on us all the while;
And we did see Him, through our tears,
Enfolding that fair form of hers,
She laughing back against His love
The kisses we had nothing of."

O that all bereaved parents might, with the eye of faith, be able to see their own little children that they have lost to sight so enfolded!

There is one other question that people ask every time they talk of the Better Country, and that is: "Shall we know each other there?" Well, let us see: do you want to know your loved ones? Is that what your heart craves? Then again I invoke the word of Jesus: "If it were not so, I would have told you." Mr. Riley seems to entertain no doubt about it. In that mellifluous poem of his, "Out of the Hitherwhere," he speaks of recognizing his friends and embracing his mother and laughing again with his old schoolmates. Let me quote the first two stanzas:

"Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon
The land that the Lord's love rests upon;
Where one may rely on the friends he meets,
And the smiles that greet him along the streets;

Where the mother that left you years ago
Will lift the hands that were folded so,
And put them about you, with all the love
And tenderness you are dreaming of.

"Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon—
Where all of the friends of your youth have gone,—
Where the old schoolmate that laughed with you,
Will laugh again as he used to do,
Running to meet you, with such a face
As lights like a moon the wondrous place
Where God is living, and glad to live,
Since He is the Master and may forgive."

That is another difference which the resurrection of Christ has made; in pre-Christian literature we can read how some Ulysses in the dim woods of Hades recognizes the pale shades of heroes. But now immortality means that the faces of those we have loved long since and lost a while shall smile again; that the family is immortal as well as the individual.

"Look up! and own, in gratefulness of prayer,
Submission to the will of Heaven's High Host:—
I see your Angel-soldier pacing there,
Expectant at his post,"

said Mr. Riley in his long poem on "The Silent Victors," which he read at the Decoration Day exercises

at Newcastle, Indiana, eleven years after the close of our Civil War. In "Out of Reach" he says:

"You think them 'out of reach,' your dead?
Nay, by my own dead, I deny
Your 'out of reach.'—Be comforted:
'Tis not so far to die.

"O by their dear remembered smiles
And outheld hands and welcoming speech,
They wait for us, thousands of miles
This side of 'out of reach.'"

And now, because I steadfastly believe that "if a man die, he shall live again," I close this meditation with the expression of a holy resolve which James Whitcomb Riley puts into the mouth of "Tomps" in "His Mother's Way":

"Tomps 'ud allus haf to say
Somepin' 'bout 'his Mother's way.'"—

That seemed to dominate his life, and:

"Propped up on his dyin' bed,—
'Shore as Heaven's overhead,
I'm a-goin' there,' he said—
'It was Mother's way.'"

CHAPTER IX

Practical Religion: Humble Service

IN his poem entitled "My Philosofy," Riley declared

> "No man is grate tel he can see
> How less than little he would be
> Ef stripped to self, and stark and bare
> He hung his sign out anywhare."

In this instance his "Philosophy" squares with that of other great thinkers. Confucius once said: "Humility is the solid foundation of all the virtues." John Ruskin said: "I believe that the first test of a truly great man is humility." Whittier felt that

> "The Lord's best interpreters
> Are humble human souls."

Jesus Himself once gave an example of true greatness when He washed the disciples' feet. This foot-washing was not in the remotest sense of the word a religious ceremony. It was a custom of the time that when a stranger entered a home his sandals were laid off at the door, and a servant, the most

menial servant of the household, was assigned the task of washing the dust and sand off his feet. On this particular occasion, Jesus and His disciples had entered into an "upper room" for supper. There was no servant there to perform this ordinary lowly task. While they were preparing for supper, Jesus heard the ambitious disciples wrangling among themselves as to who should be *the greatest.* Then, determining to give them an object lesson, He laid aside His outer garments, girded Himself with a towel, filled a basin with water, and stooping down, washed the disciples' feet. When He had finished, He said: "If I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example." It would be interesting to go through the Gospels and pick out the deeds of lowly service which Jesus performed. And then to note this: that His dignity suffered no abatement in the doing of them. Why? Because He was big enough to do the little task. It takes a big man to do it.

Humility is indeed proof of a man's greatness. True moral greatness is as fragrant as the trailing arbutus, and like it seeks the shade. Humility is not meanness of spirit; not cringing; not a low esti-

mate of one's powers; not an expression worn on the countenance; not inverted pride; not self-depreciating speech. It is a form and spirit of activity. It is willingness to serve. It is the key to the highest service. It brings high thoughts down to intense work in the depths. It gives service its true dignity. It glorifies all service. Humbling ourselves to the cross of burden-bearing for others leads to the greatest usefulness.

Happy will the world be when all professed followers of the Man of Galilee overcome their bickerings and faultfindings and petty rivalries, and get together on the great business of serving mankind. The world will not long misunderstand such a religion as that. And that was the kind for which Mr. Riley longed. One of his very earliest poems he entitled "Job Work," in which he set "the poet" (himself) the task of writing "a rhyme of the present time." And so he sang of the Civil War that had been recently ended, and of home, and of monopoly's swift decay, and of temperance, but best of all:

> "He sang the lay of religion's sway,
> Where a hundred creeds clasp hands
> And shout in glee such a symphony
> That the whole world understands."

"The Good, Old-Fashioned People" is a poem written in the child dialect, where the child is speaking of the good old-fashioned people that Uncle Sidney tells about. "Uncle Sidney" is Mr. Riley himself—it was the name which his nephews and nieces were wont to give him. These good old-fashioned people, among other things, were unselfish and loved their neighbors as themselves:

> "They was God's people, Uncle says,
> An' gloried in His name,
> An' worked, without no selfishness,
> An' loved their neighbors same
> As they was kin."

Truly such folks are "God's people"—who glory in His name, and unselfishly work for others, loving their neighbors as themselves. In such a spirit we find the secret of all human progress; in the upreach to God and the outreach to man. There is not a movement for the dignifying of manhood or the sweeting of human life that has not had its inspiration in religion. It is a strange thing to us of this day, for example, to read that there ever was a time or section of the country when the institution of human slavery was defended by ministers of the

Gospel, whose arguments were clinched by quotations from the Holy Word. And the day will come when certain practises of to-day that are warmly defended by otherwise good people will be just as surely outlawed and considered as diametrically opposed to Christian living as is slavery. The church must harness and direct the great social movements of this day; for without the goad, the spur, the push of a great spiritual passion, all of our modern fine-spun theories of social justice, economic righteousness, and political purity will fall to the ground. Since the devotional, worshiping spirit is the inspiration of the ethical spirit, let the church keep alive the spirit of worship. But if it reaches up toward God in worship, let it not fail to reach out toward man in service. It will not need to hunt long for texts for sermons on every movement of human betterment. Thus in the group of poems called "A Child World" there is a tale told by "The Noted Traveler," who tells the struggle of certain slaves escaping from the inferno of slavery, and working weary years and years to ransom their children. And when the parents returned with their oldest boy the happiness spread everywhere until:

"It even reached
And thrilled the town till the *Church* was stirred
Into suspecting that wrong was wrong!—
And it stayed awake as the preacher preached
A *Real* 'Love'-text that he had not long
To ransack for in the Holy Word."

Riley is right again. It is amazing what a large place love occupies in the Holy Word. The epitome of the Gospel is this: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." "God is love," we are told, and "Love is of God." Jesus was love incarnate, and the Cross was the crowning revelation of the love of God. The whole process of redemption is love coming from heaven to earth to create and kindle love, and make it triumph over human hearts and lives. That which avails for salvation, we are taught, is not rites and ceremonies, but "faith working through love." Love is the presiding queen over all the Christian graces. Love is the prime fruit of the spirit.

No wonder that another of Riley's poems he entitled "The Text," and wrote the following wholesome exhortation:

"The text: Love thou thy fellow man!
He may have sinned;—One proof indeed,
He is thy fellow, reach thy hand
And help him in his need!

"Love thou thy fellow man. He may
Have wronged thee—then, the less excuse
Thou hast for wronging him. Obey
What he has dared refuse!

"Love thou thy fellow man—for, be
His life a light or heavy load,
No less he needs the love of thee
To help him on his road."

Mere sham or pretense are not tolerated by the Hoosier poet. He believes in prayers, but he believes emphatically that man ought to work as he prays; that a man's life ought to square with his profession. His "As My Uncle Ust to Say" contains these emphatic words, which are as true as gospel:

"I've thought a power on men and things—
As my uncle ust to say,—
And ef folks don't work as they pray, i jings!
W'y, they ain't no use to pray!"

It is astonishing how many of our prayers we can help God to answer, if only we "work as we pray." Riley's own heart-yearning is poured into "A Mortul Prayer," the final petition of which is:

"Make me to love my feller man—
Yea, though his bitterness
Doth bite as only adders can—
Let *me* the fault confess,
And go to him and clasp his hand
And love him none the less.
So keep me, Lord, ferever free
From vain concete er whim;
And he whose pius eyes can see
My faults, however dim,—
Oh! let him pray the least fer me,
And me the most fer him!"

In "Anselmo" the poet causes Father Anselmo (which is only a characteristic name, not an historical one) to speak of his seeking the Lord's grace, and how hoping to please God he practised the most rigid asceticism; how he performed dread penance; knelt with bleeding knees; put ashes on his head; scourged himself, and yet his prayers were all in vain. And then awakening from a swoon he saw a wretched outcast bathing his brow with many a pitying sigh, and he prayed God's grace to rest on this outcast, and then he heard a gentle voice say:

"'Thou shalt not sob in suppliance hereafter;
Take up thy prayers and wring them dry of tears,
And lift them, white and pure with love and laughter.'

"So is it now for all men else I pray;
So is it I am blest and glad alway."

What a different world it would be if every Christian worked as he prayed. And then suppose that his constant prayer would be that Christ's will were his own. This is the teaching of Mr. Riley in the child poem "A Defective Santa Claus." He says the little child on Christmas eve knelt down by his bed and said the prayer that Uncle Sidney taught him to say (Uncle Sidney was the name that the nephews and nieces gave to the poet). And the prayer is this:

> "O Father mine, e'en as Thine own,
> This child looks up to Thee alone;
> Asleep or waking, give him still
> His Elder Brother's wish and will."

He closed the poem which he wrote upon the death of Mrs. Benjamin Harrison with the idea that the supreme good is God's will, thus:

> "We see her still,
> Even as here she stood—
> All that was pure and good
> And sweet in womanhood—
> God's will her will."

How shall we reach "The Highest Good"? What is "the summum bonum" of life? These are questions that are iterated and reiterated by weary mor-

tals every day in quest of the highest good. What shall we do? If we ask our poet he tells us in simple phrase just to do our honest best:

> "To attain the highest good
> Of true man and womanhood,
> Simply do your honest best—
> God with joy will do the rest."

That is, character is a by-product of service. In many of the poems of our sweet singer, especially those on persons, this thought is developed. Thus when Surgeon Smith died, he wrote a sonnet which he called "The Noblest Service," in the center of which stand these two lines:

> "His steadfast step still found the pathway toward
> The noblest service paid Humanity."

It was this same devotion to the service of Humanity that caused Mr. Riley to write as follows concerning John Brown, the famous abolitionist:

> "Writ in between the lines of his life-deed
> We trace the sacred service of a heart
> Answering the Divine command in every part
> Bearing on human weal: His love did feed
> The loveless; and his gentle hands did lead
> The blind, and lift the weak, and balm the smart
> Of other wounds than rankled at the dart

In his own breast, that glorified thus to bleed.
He served the lowliest first—nay, then alone—
The most despisèd that e'er wreaked vain breath
In cries of suppliance in the reign whereat
Red Guilt sate squat upon her spattered throne.—
For these doomed there it was he went to death.
God! how the merest man loves one like that!"

Certainly "the merest man loves one like that." Always and always such sacrificial service is the highway to immortal renown. The man who lives for others (and here is another by-product of unselfish service) passes into an earthly immortality as well as a heavenly. Upon the death of James A. Mount, a farmer and an orator, and once governor of the state of Indiana, Mr. Riley wrote "A Good Man," and in this poem he describes a good man as one

"Who lives for you and me—
Lives for the world he tries
To help,—he lives eternally.
A good man never dies.

"Who lives to bravely take
His share of toil and stress,
And, for his weaker fellows' sake,
Makes every burden less."

One of Riley's most generally quoted poems is "Our Kind of a Man." What a magnificent picture

it is of the man whose faith works through love; of the man who gives hands and feet to the Gospel. It is the man who smites wrong with a knuckled faith; who lives what he preaches; who is ears to the deaf and eyes to the blind; who helps the widow and the sick; who gives full credit for honest effort however little the results may be; who shares the pain of the doubts that rack heart and brain; who looks on sin with pitying eyes, even as the Lord, who has promised that though our sins should glow as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow:

> "And, feeling still, with a grief half glad,
> That the bad are as good as the good are bad,
> He strikes straight out for the Right—and he
> Is the kind of a man for you and me!"

But the service of Love must begin with our thoughts concerning others. We ought to take kindly views of doubtful actions. We ought to put the best possible construction on another's word or deed. If we think unkindly about others we can not act otherwise in the end; for "thoughts winged with feelings are springs of action." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," speaks he, does he in the end. Therefore, it is a good thing for those who would serve others to adopt as their own that most typical

expression of Riley's creed, that first appeared under the title "The Human Heart," but finally "As Created":

> "There's a space for good to bloom in
> Every heart of man or woman,—
> And however wild or human,
> Or however brimmed with gall,
> Never heart may beat without it;
> And the darkest heart to doubt it
> Has something good about it
> After all!"

Thus does he proclaim a universal sympathy. It is Christian to recognize the Neighborhood and Brotherhood of man. The modern Jericho Road stretches far away. It is filled with a vast polyglot procession from every land under the sun. They are a host of needy creatures. The halt and hurt, the blind and orphan, the wounded and worsted, yea, and those that sin are there. The true Christian knows absolutely nothing of race prejudice, and class hatred, and social distinctions, and denominational bigotry. But he loves folks because they are world neighbors of his, world kinsmen, indeed, brothers of his in mortality and sin, it is true, but brothers also in immortality. This is the sentiment with which Riley closes his poem on "Writin' Back to the Home-Folks":

"And ef we minded God, I guess
We'd *all* love one another
Jes' like one famb'ly,—me and Pap
And Madaline and Mother."

It is this idea of the familyhood of the race that moves through "My Ruthers," a "Benj. F. Johnson" poem that purported to have been "Writ durin' State Fair at Indanoplis, whilse visitin' a Son in law then residin' thare," a part of which we give herewith:

"I'd ruther kindo' git the swing
O' what was *needed,* first, I jing!
Afore I *swet* at anything!—
Ef I only had my ruthers;—
In fact I'd aim to be the same
With all men as my brothers;
And they'd all be the same with *me*—
Ef I only had my ruthers.

"The pore 'ud git theyr dues *some*times—
Ef I only had my ruthers,—
And be paid *dollars* 'stid o' *dimes,*
Fer childern, wives and mothers:
Theyr boy that slaves; theyr girl that sews—
Fer *others*—not herself, God knows!—
The grave's *her* only change of clothes!
. . . Ef I only had my ruthers,
They'd all have 'stuff' and time enugh
To answer one-another's
Appealin' prayer fer 'lovin' care'—
Ef I only had my ruthers.

"They'd be few folks 'ud ast fer trust,
  Ef I only had my ruthers,
And blame few business men to bu'st
  Theyrselves, er harts of others:
    Big Guns that come here durin' Fair-
    Week could put up jest anywhere,
    And find a full-and-plenty thare,
  Ef I only had my ruthers:
The rich and great 'ud 'sociate
  With all theyr lowly brothers,
Feelin' *we* done the honorun—
  Ef I only had my ruthers."

Riley always had a deep and tender sympathy with the poor and lowly. He did not attempt to incite them, as did Burns and Shelley, to revolt against their exploiters and despoilers. Nevertheless, he had the profoundest respect for and sympathy with honest toil. Without envying the rich, he loved the poor. He had seen too often the effects of great wealth upon its possessor; hence, one of the greatest lines he ever wrote is:

"They's nothin' much patheticker'n jes' a-bein' rich."

Riley was acquainted with the corroding fret of poverty. He had known by experience the fierce and tragic struggle for existence. Though in his later years he became rich from the ever-increasing

royalty on his books, yet his simple, unostentatious nature prayed "Ike Walton's Prayer":

"I pray not that
Men tremble at
My power of place
And lordly sway,
I only pray for simple grace
To look my neighbor in the face
Full honestly from day to day—
Yield me his horny palm to hold,
And I'll not pray
For gold;—
The tanned face, garlanded with mirth,
It hath the kingliest smile on earth;
The swart brow, diamonded with sweat,
Hath never need of coronet."

While in such poems as "A Poor Man's Wealth" and "Down to the Capital" he pities those who are rich in purse but poor in spirit; rich in luxuriant raiment and blazing with diamonds and precious stones but poor in intellect; crying out

"They's nothin' much patheticker'n jes' a-bein' rich,"

yet it was of the common folk whom he knew so well and loved with such intense fidelity and devotion that he usually sang. In "Little Mandy's Christmas-Tree" we have in child style a most pathetic description of a poverty-stricken home:

front step down, no door-knob, no window shutters, brown paper pasted where the window glass was broken, no fuel, no carpet, no food, nothing indeed but want and sorrow. And then a committee was sent from the Sunday-School to this home of little Mandy to invite them to participate in the joys of the Christmas-Tree at the Sunday-School; and when little Mandy did not know what a Christmas-Tree was, it was planned to have a little tree hidden behind the larger one to present to her for her very own. But when Christmas Eve came and the church was full of happy children and their teachers and parents, and the little tree was behind the big one, and little Mandy's name was called, little Mandy did not answer, for she was gone to be with Him, whose birthday they were celebrating; and then the resolution was formed that: hereafter the poor neglected children of the town shall receive more consideration at the Christmas season, and the fortunate little children who have abundance would give a tree to those who lacked, and they would call this tree "Little Mandy's Tree":

> "*Little Mandy,* though, *she* don't
> Answer—and Ma says 'she won't
> *Never,* though each year they'll be
> "Little Mandy's Chris-mus-Tree"

"'Fer pore childern'—my Ma says—
And *Committee* say they guess
'Little Mandy's Tree' 'ull be
Bigger than the *other* Tree!"

The kindly poet would have Christians manifest that form of sympathy known as philanthropy, and he would have them do it in the name of the beneficent Christ. In the poem "The Curse of the Wandering Foot" he makes a tramp use these words:

"Give me to sup of your pity—
Feast me on prayers!—O ye,
Met I your Christ in the city,
He would fare forth with me."

Such unselfish service, done in the name of Christ, is the best credential for religion. We have not forgotten how, when in perplexity John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus inquiring if He really were the Coming One, or whether they should look for another, Jesus simply told them to go back and tell John what they saw, how "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleaned, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." That was enough. Any religion that carries out such a practical program of the ministry of sympathy as that will not have to argue long for its claim to Divinity.

In "His Vigil" our beloved poet causes one who has been comforted and helped by another to beg that other to remain by him—

"Just as God were sitting here."

Nothing finer was ever said about a person than that: to remind one's fellows of God! That is an ambition big enough for the best of us; so to serve as to make others think of God.

But not only does such a spirit recommend God to others, it also is well-pleasing to God Himself. Once when Riley was in reminiscent mood he wrote a poem which describes the lore of the shoe-shop at Greenfield, his boyhood home. The subject of the poem is a journeyman shoemaker by the name of "Jim." He was a patient, honest, jovial man, with a quick and serving sympathy for all who stood in need of help, and just because he responded to every appeal to help the needy, Mr. Riley concludes:

"When God made Jim, I bet you He didn't
Do anything else that day, but jes' set around and feel good."

We sometimes talk about right for right's sake and duty for duty's sake, and we say that a man ought to do right just because it is right, and not because some one has told him to do right. Neverthe-

less, it is impossible to get the race of mankind away from the idea of rewards and punishments, and the surest way to correct evils and to restrain individuals from doing that which is wrong, is to have implanted within every one an unquestioning old-fashioned faith in the universal presence of God. If we can get people to understand that "Thou God seest me" is a sentiment just as fit to be used to-day as it was in Hagar's time; if we can make the business man understand that God notes every transaction of his; if we can make the young man know that God sees him in the darkness as in the daylight, abroad as at home; and that God not only sees but that He cares; then we have gone a long way not only in bringing up a race of people who are masterpieces of restraint, but we have also done much to develop characters that are absolutely God-like in their positive good. Now, that God does see and is pleased when His children make heavy hearts light, is most clearly expressed by Mr. Riley in "The Book of Joyous Children," where he says:

> "Front the Father's smiling face—
> Smiling, that *you* smile the brighter
> For the heavy hearts made lighter,
> Since you smile with Him."

Still another by-product of unselfish service is happiness. The quest of happiness is the universal quest of mankind. Making this quest men will work for gold until they become as hard as the metal they seek. They will follow learning until they become as lifeless as the pages they scan; they will give themselves to sensual pleasures until they become reeking masses of corruption; but our kind poet has the unfailing prescription for happiness. In the "Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers," when some one asked him for a prescription "fer bein' happy by," Doc wrote on a piece of paper these words:

"Go he'p the sick, and putt your heart in it."

Riley wrote that this Doc Sifers did not need to claim any creed, and that he did not raise loud, vainglorious prayers in crowded marts or public ways to be heard of men, but that his prayers rose from way deep down in his heart, when he was out alone at night facing the storm on his way to assuage human suffering, when all the rest of the town was comfortably at rest. He was always ready to answer any calls at any time of night or day and whether folks were rich or poor. He could be found at the bedside of anguish and when the patient was

past all human power, Doc would try to make it easier for the patient to sing the triumphant words of Saint Paul: "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!"

How many tragedies of evil temper there are in the world, and the sad thing about it is that those who have a touchy disposition, or a quick, or sullen, or revengeful temper are rather proud of the fact. Riley has the right idea when he insists that a man ought to show his *temper* who is boss; and that the finest manhood is developed by overcoming the temptations of a quick or sullen temper. He says that that is what man's temper is for, to hold back out of view, and to teach it never to get ahead of one. Thus in the "Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers" he says:

"Doc's got a *temper*; but, he says, he's learnt it which is boss,
Yit has to *watch* it, more er less. . . . I never seen him cross
But onc't, enough to make him swear;—milch-cow stepped on his toe,
And Doc ripped out 'I *doggies!*'—There's the only case I know.

"Doc says that's what your temper's fer—to hold back out o' view,
And learn it never to occur on out ahead o' *you*.—
'*You* lead the way,' says Sifers—'git your *temper* back in line—
And *furdest* back the *best*, ef it's as mean a one as mine!'"

And Doc hates contentions. He can't abide

wrangles or disputes of any kind. He will leave a crowd and slip up some back alley as soon as a fight begins or abusive terms are used. He says the side that he generally takes is the one he never hears.

But practical religion does not exhaust itself in doing; it expresses itself also in our speech. Here, also, we have instruction from our bard in his poem entitled "Let Something Good Be Said":

"When over the fair fame of friend or foe
The Shadows of disgrace shall fall, instead
Of words of blame, or proof of thus and so,
Let something good be said.

"Forget not that no fellow-being yet
May fall so low but love may lift his head:
Even the cheek of shame with tears is wet,
If something good be said.

"No generous heart may vainly turn aside
In ways of sympathy; no soul so dead
But may awaken strong and glorified,
If something good be said.

"And so I charge ye, by the thorny crown,
And by the cross on which the Saviour bled,
And by your own soul's hope of fair renown,
Let something good be said!"

Read those words over again—and then again. Most of us need the advice contained in them. How

prone we are to hint a fault in another's character; to give our inferences as actual fact; to repeat our suspicions for truth; to impute a false motive for another's word or deed; to tell a half-truth, which is worse than a whole lie; to maintain a malignant silence when another's character is traduced or vilified. Shame on us! Let us read over again—and live—"Let Something Good Be Said."

Christ said, "Forgive your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that despitefully use you." That is a mighty hard doctrine to live up to always, but Mr. Riley was speaking in "My Foe" to one who so named himself. Mr. Riley said that he refused to designate his opponent by a term so dark. He said that to him he was most kind and true and that he was as grateful for him as the dusk is for the dews. He urges that his "Foe" shall not vex himself for any lack of moan or cry of his; he says that he is not afraid of any harm or bruise reaching his soul through any stroke of his enemy's. He would rather call the man who describes himself as "foe" a helpless friend, thus:

> "So, blessing you, with pitying countenance,
> I wave a hand to you, my helpless friend."

So we have had our message of practical religion. Thank you, dear Riley, for it. We can not close this meditation in any better way than by quoting "A Simple Recipe" which our poet wrote to a young friend, "Showing How to Make the Right Kind of a Man Out of the Right Kind of a Boy." The "Recipe" is not so hard to read (be honest, keep clean, do your level best), but it is harder to take:

"Be honest—both in word and act,
Be strictly truthful through and through:
Fact can not fail.—You stick to fact,
And fact will stick to you.

"Be clean—outside and in, and sweep
Both hearth and heart and hold them bright;
Wear snowy linen—aye, and keep
Your *conscience* snowy-white.

"Do right, your utmost—good *must* come
To you who do your level best—
Your very hopes will help you some,
And work will do the rest."

CHAPTER X

Patriotism in Riley's Rhymes

IT should be set to some stirring, singable music—James Whitcomb Riley's "America." It possesses every qualification of a truly national anthem; it appeals to those two thoughts that most profoundly stir our emotions: our country and our God. It makes just sufficient allusion to our history, and gives adequate expression to our ideals. It is true poetry: the mellifluous consonants are used, but not dragged in unnaturally; alliterations are there, but not strained after; the rhythm is faultless; the rhyme is effective; the repetition of "America! America!" is most impressive. It is not too long; there are just five stanzas of it; let us give it in full:

"In the need that bows us thus,
America!
Shape a mighty song for us—
America!
Song to whelm a hundred years'
Roar of wars and rain of tears
'Neath a world's triumphant cheers:
America! America!

"Lift the trumpet to thy mouth,
America!
East and West and North and South—
America!
Call us round the dazzling shrine
Of the starry old ensign—
New baptized in blood of thine,
America! America!

"Dying eyes through pitying mists,
America!
See the Assassin's shackled wrists,
America!
Patient eyes that turn their sight
From all blackening crime and blight
Still toward Heaven's holy light—
America! America!

"High o'erlooking sea and land,
America!
Trustfully with outheld hand,
America!
Thou dost welcome all in quest
Of thy freedom, peace and rest—
Every exile is thy guest,
America! America!

"Thine a universal love,
America!
Thine the cross and crown thereof,
America!
Aid us, then, to sing thy worth;
God hath builded, from thy birth,
The first nation of the earth—
America! America!"

It was composed on September 14, 1901, the day President McKinley died. To make a particular event the occasion for speaking general truth is the function of the prophet; and to soar from some solemn solitude into the eternities is the prerogative of the seer. Thus is the poet greater than the historian; the poet expresses the universal because the universal is within him.

The main title of the above poem is "America," but its subtitle is "O Thou, America—Messiah of Nations." That is a mighty happy title. We wonder whether Riley got the idea from Lowell's lines:

> "All nations have their message from on high,
> Each the messiah of some central thought
> For the fulfillment and delight of men,"

or whether he got it straight from the Bible; for the Old Testament is full of the messianic consciousness of the Jewish nation. The word "Messiah" means anointed; and the anointing was an inauguration ritual used among the Jews to set one apart for some special work. Priests and kings were anointed. And in the thought of the Jews their whole nation was anointed. Thus Habakkuk says: "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, for the salvation of thine anointed." And in Isaiah God

says to the nation: "It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

This messianic conception, which is one of the greatest miracles of the Bible, runs through it all. That in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth were to be blessed was the pivotal idea on which the history of the patriarchs turned. They felt that they had a world-wide commission. The prophets labored to get Israel to rise above a narrow provincialism to the great task of carrying salvation to the whole world.

This was why they were the "chosen people," chosen to serve. Jesus was the Messiah because he fulfilled in himself these words of the prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

In the light of the messianic conception as hinted at above, we get some idea of the great sermon that

Mr. Riley preaches by the subtle use he makes of it in the subtitle of his poem: "O Thou, America—Messiah of Nations."

But if America has a messianic mission, what is it? In another of Riley's poems, "The Quest of the Fathers," it is set forth. He asks:

> "What were our Forefathers trying to find
> When they weighed anchor, that desperate hour
> They turned from home, and the warning wind
> Sighed in the sails of the old Mayflower?"

Could they find anything to compensate them for what they were leaving behind—their native land, its history, its throne, its church, its gold, its cheer, and the green mounds where their brave sires slumbered? They left their old home with pale, sternly-set faces, close-locked lips, tearless eyes:

> "But O, the light from the soul within,
> As each spake each with a flashing mind—
> As the lightning speaks to its kith and kin!
> What were our Forefathers trying to find?"

The foot of their ship was set in a pathless sea. They groped their way through storms and fogs, and mists and blinding rain, and were unable to see the skies, but

"The Lord's look found *them* ne'ertheless—
Found them, yea, in their piteous lot,
As they in their faith from the first divined—
Found them and favored them—too. But what—
What were our Forefathers trying to find?"

At last they landed on a frozen shore, bleak and dread; but they were so glad that as they knelt in prayer the very snows seemed warm:

"For, lo! they were close on the trail they sought:—
In the sacred soil of the rights of men
They marked where the Master-hand had wrought;
And there they garnered and sowed again.—
Their land—then *ours,* as to-day it is,
With its flag of heaven's own light designed,
And God's vast love o'er all. . . . And *this*
Is what our forefathers were trying to find."

The thing the Forefathers were trying to find was more clearly described by the poet in "Liberty," a poem written twenty-three years before "The Quest of the Fathers." In "Liberty" he represents himself as looking out on the "gulf of years," through the lens of history and discerning the approaching *Mayflower* as drifting through "the fogs of wrong." He pictures their landing upon Plymouth Rock, and tells of the days of toil, days of pain, days of despair that followed. But they stayed, they conquered.

Then the woodman shaped a song of Liberty, one stanza of which is:

"Sing for the arms that fling
Their fetters in the dust
And lift their hands in higher trust
Unto the one Great King;
Sing for the patriot heart and hand;
Sing for the country they have planned;
Sing that the world may understand
This is Freedom's land!"

It is a most interesting narrative poem that goes on to tell of the subduing of the forest, the nesting of cabins, the fighting with Indians, the increasing number of colonies that "like footprints in the sand marked Freedom's pathway winding through the land." And these footprints of Freedom led to Lexington and Bunker Hill, and on to the Fourth of July, when Independence Bell was charged to

"Ring in the gleaming dawn
Of Freedom—Toll the knell
Of Tyranny, and then ring on,
O Independence Bell."

Still on and on, through the Civil War, and still on, until

"O Liberty, it is thy power
To gladden us in every hour."

This, then, is the special mission of America: to furnish hospice for Freedom; to guard the idea of Liberty as the never-sleeping dragon of mythology guarded the gardens of the Hesperides. And if America is the Messiah of Nations it is under divine compulsion to make the world safe for Liberty.

Wherever our flag is unfurled to the breeze it is a pledge of liberty and justice; a pledge that the rights of the weakest will be respected. That is the reason why we love

> "The dear old Flag, whose faintest flutter flies
> A stirring echo through each patriot breast,"

as James Whitcomb Riley says in "The Silent Victors." We call it "Old Glory." Why? Lots of people want to know. Mr. Riley answers the question in "The Name of Old Glory." It is rather long to quote the whole of it here; but it is so good, so racy, so patriotic, so illustrative of Riley's love of indulging in whimsical combinations, that we must have it all. Note how the tone of it deepens as it proceeds:

"Old Glory! say, who,
By the ships and the crew,
And the long, blended ranks of the gray and the blue,—
Who gave you the name of Old Glory?

With such pride everywhere
As you cast yourself free to the rapturous air
And leap out full-length, as we're wanting you to?—
Who gave you that name, with the ring of the same
And the honor and fame so becoming to you?—
Your stripes stroked in ripples of white and of red,
With your stars at their glittering best overhead—
By day or by night
Their delightfulest light
Laughing down from their little square heaven of blue!—
Who gave you the name of Old Glory?—say, who—
Who gave you the name of Old Glory?

"The old banner lifted, and faltering then
In vague lisps and whispers fell silent again.

"Old Glory,—speak out!—we are asking about
How you happened to "favor" a name, so to say,
That sounds so familiar and careless and gay
As we cheer it and shout in our wild breezy way—
We—the *crowd,* every man of us, calling you that—
We—Tom, Dick, and Harry—each swinging his hat
And hurrahing "Old Glory!" like you were our kin,
When—*Lord!*—we all know we're as common as sin!
And yet it just seems like you *humor* us all
And waft us your thanks, as we hail you and fall
Into line, with you over us, waving us on
Where our glorified, sanctified betters have gone.—
(And we're wanting it *so!*—
Where our own fathers went we are willing to go.)—
Who gave you the name of Old Glory—Oho!—
Who gave you the name of Old Glory?

"The old flag unfurled with a billowy thrill
For an instant, then wistfully sighed and was still.

"Old Glory: the story we're wanting to hear
Is what the plain facts of your christening were,—
For your name—just to hear it,
Repeat it, and cheer it, 's a tang to the spirit
As salt as a tear;—
And seeing you fly, and the boys marching by,
There's a shout in the throat and a blur in the eye
And an aching to live for you always—or die,
If, dying, we still keep you waving on high.
And so by our love
For you, floating above,
And the scars of all wars and the sorrows thereof,
Who gave you the name of Old Glory and why
Are we thrilled at the name of Old Glory?

"Then the old banner leaped, like a sail in the blast,
And fluttered an audible answer at last.—

"And it spake, with a shake of the voice, and it said:—
By the driven snow-white and the living blood-red
Of my bars, and their heaven of stars overhead—
By the symbol conjoined of them all, skyward cast,
As I float from the steeple, or flap at the mast,
Or droop o'er the sod where the long grasses nod,—
My name is as old as the glory of God.
. . . . So I came by the name of Old Glory."

There again you can hear the messianic call to America. If it should ever fail to rise to its sublime opportunity of being the seed-plot of freedom for the world, its failure would be the tragic scandal of the ages. But it shall not fail; for did not Mr. Riley only say what is in the heart of each one of us

when he assured our nation's hallowed emblem there's

> ". . . an aching to live for you always—or die,
> If, dying, we still keep you waving on high."

And many have died for Old Glory. Indeed our bard sees "The Conqueror" crowned eternally

> "And sheltered under a flag that shakes
> Her silken stripes and her silver stars
> Into a tangle of endless wars."

Mr. Riley's father was a soldier, a captain in the Union Army during the Civil War. In many, very many, of his poems reference to the war creeps in. He was always quick to honor in exalted line the glorious lineage of "The Soldier."

> "The Soldier.—Lo, he ever was and is
> Our Country's high custodian, by right
> Of patriot blood that brims that heart of his."

Within the Soldier's inviolate care "the Nation takes repose." The Soldier is the guardian of her inmost fane of Freedom. Our thoughts are blown

> "Back where The Soldier battled, nor refused
> A grave all nameless in a clime unknown.—
> The Soldier—though, perchance, worn, old and gray;
> The Soldier—though, perchance, the merest lad,—
> The Soldier—though he gave his life away,
> Hearing the shout of 'Victory,' was glad;

"Ay, glad and grateful, that in such a cause
His veins were drained at Freedom's holy shrine—
Rechristening the land—as first it was,—
His blood poured thus in sacramental sign
Of new baptism of the hallowed name
'My Country'—now on every lip once more
And blest of God with still enduring fame.—
This thought even then The Soldier gloried o'er."

But why so ready to die for "my Country"? We get our answer from "Liberty" (referred to earlier), and the answer carries us back to the messianic conception of our nation:

"O Liberty—the dearest word
A bleeding country ever heard,—
We lay our hopes upon thy shrine
And offer up our lives for thine."

One of Riley's earlier poems is "The Silent Victors." He wrote it as a young man in his late teens or early twenties, while he was trying to study law in the office of his father, who was a lawyer and an orator of more than ordinary ability. James Whitcomb Riley never liked law. He said that for the life of him he could not make Blackstone and economics rhyme. Therefore, while his father would be in the court room trying some case, this young "case" whom he seemed unable fully to understand, would be writing poetry. Among the

poems of that period is "The Silent Victors." He read it at a Decoration Day service in 1878. It is in praise of the

"Warm hearts that beat their lives out at the shrine
Of Freedom, while our country held its breath
As brave battalions wheeled themselves in line
And marched upon their death:

"When Freedom's Flag, its fatal wounds scarce healed,
Was torn from peaceful winds and flung again
To shudder in the storm of battle-field—
The elements of men."

Six years after "The Silent Victors" was written our poet wrote another Decoration Day poem, "Soldiers Here To-day," in which he more plainly described the physical tortures which men were willing to undergo for the sake of Freedom. He greeted them in chaste language, from spectral fortress walls and from crumbling battlements and:

"From living tombs where every hope seemed lost—
With famine quarantined by bristling guns—
The prison-pens—the guards—the 'dead-line' crossed
By—riddled skeletons!

"From furrowed plains, sown thick with bursting shells—
From mountain gorge, and toppling crags o'erhead—
From wards of pestilential hospitals,
And trenches of the dead."

But the soldier who blazed with courage to de-

fend the dear old Flag, "regardless of the shower of shell and shot," who plunged with dauntless pride into the crimson sea of carnage, was by no means the only one who sacrificed for the cause of Freedom: the mother who knelt in the empty night; the wife who wrote to her husband to tell of the babe waiting for his caress, and her letter passed one that was to tell her of his death; the maiden who in fancy pressed her lips upon the brow that once was dewy with her kiss, but now held the dew of death:

"O Mother, you who miss the smiling face
Of that dear boy who vanished from your sight,
And left you weeping o'er the vacant place
He used to fill at night,—

"Who left you dazed, bewildered, on a day
That echoed wild huzzas, and roar of guns
That drowned the farewell words you tried to say
To incoherent ones:—

"Be glad and proud you had the life to give—
Be comforted through all the years to come,—
Your country has a longer life to live,
Your son a better home.

"O Widow, weeping o'er the orphaned child,
Who only lifts his questioning eyes to send
A keener pang to grief unreconciled,—
Teach him to comprehend

"He had a father brave enough to stand
Before the fire of Treason's blazing gun,
That, dying, he might will the rich old land
Of Freedom to his son.

"And, Maiden, living on through lonely years
In fealty to love's enduring ties,—
With strong faith gleaming through the tender tears
That gather in your eyes.

"Look up! and own, in gratefulness of prayer,
Submission to the will of Heaven's High Host:—
I see your Angel-soldier pacing there,
Expectant at his post."

Another illustration of the deeds of heroism, too often unrecorded, performed for Liberty is "The Old Man and Jim." This poem is a universal favorite. It is read and quoted by men who are not in the habit of reading poetry—who are so foolish as to think it a sign of weakness to be caught in the act of reading poetry of any kind, but who read Riley and tolerate sentiment in him because he makes it altogether natural and wraps a familiar atmosphere of perfect reality around his poems. You have to trap the average man into any display of emotion and the Hoosier bard spreads for him many a net from which there is no escape; as in "The Old Man and Jim," where the subject is the loneliness

and heartache of the farmer who was too old to go to the war but who permitted Jim, in whom he was "jes' wrapped up," to go. A comrade tells the story. He tells how the "old man never had much to say." The first time he heard him speak was when Jim joined the army:

> "And all 'at I heerd the old man say
> Was, jes' as we turned to start away,—
> 'Well, good-by, Jim:
> Take keer of yourse'f!'"

The fond father appeared to be satisfied if he could just look at Jim. Therefore, he followed him to the drill ground and to the depot, and gave him again the

> "'Well, good-by, Jim:
> Take keer of yourse'f!'"

And was proud when "Cap. Biggler" wrote home of the boy's exploits of bravery. You can feel the touch of unutterable homesickness in the father's heart for Jim, and his high faith in him in the fact that he

> "Tuk the papers, the old man did,
> A-watchin' fer Jim—
> Fully believin' he'd make his mark
> *Some* way—jes' wrapped up in him!"

And he was not disappointed either. Jim won honors; he lost an arm; he became a lieutenant—till finally:

"Think of a private, now, perhaps,
We'll say like Jim,
'At's clumb clean up to the shoulder-straps—
And the old man jes' wrapped up in him!
Think of him—with the war plum' through,
And the glorious old Red-White-and-Blue
A-laughin' the news down over Jim,
And the old man, bendin' over him—
The surgeon turnin' away with tears
'At hadn't leaked fer years and years,
As the hand of the dyin' boy clung to
His father's, the old voice in his ears,—
'Well, good-by, Jim:
Take keer of yourse'f!'"

As another instance of the common patriot's worth, Mr. Riley has given us "Decoration Day on the Place." It is one of his "Benj. F. Johnson" Hoosier dialect poems. Again it is an old farmer talking. It is Decoration Day. He and his wife see their neighbors driving past to town. But this old home-keeping couple have never attended this annual service. The old man is telling how lonesome the day is to him and "Mother." They have heard wonderful tales about the music and the flowers and the orations in the town. But these sorrowing par-

ents are wondering if there isn't some way to make "The Boys" know that every day on earth is their Decoration Day, and then:

"We've tried that—me and Mother—whare Elias takes his rest,
In the orchurd—in his uniform, and hands acrost his brest,
And the flag he died fer, smilin' and a-ripplin' in the breeze
Above his grave—and over that,—*the robin in the trees!*

"And *yit* it's lonesome—lonesome!—It's a *Sund'y-day* to *me,*
It 'pears-like—more'n any day I nearly ever see!—
Still, with the Stars and Stripes above, a-flutterin' in the air,
On ev'ry soldier's grave I'd love to lay a lily thare."

Sometimes people say that a republic is ungrateful, and soon forgets those who have served it best. But any one who has tramped over the battle-fields of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill, and has seen the towering columns that mark the spots where the sod soaked in the first blood spilt for American independence, knows that the American people remember the heroic deeds of the noble dead. Any one who has stood in Independence Hall in the City of Brotherly Love, where, Pallas-like, a newborn nation sprang into giant life, and notes how a grateful people preserve the historic place intact, knows the American people remember. Any one who has seen at our nation's Capital the highest

monument in the world, built by a loving people to the memory of the majestic Washington, knows the American people remember. Any one who has observed on Memorial Day the graves of our soldier-dead become beds of flowers, their tombs thrones of honor, knows the American people remember whose forms are placed within their narrow walls.

So when the patriotic movement was started to erect the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument at Indianapolis, Mr. Riley wrote a poem in sympathy with it. It is all good; but the first and last stanzas are sufficient to discover the underlying principle of all these fit memorials. They read as follows:

"A monument for the Soldiers!
And what will ye build it of?
Can ye build it of marble, or brass, or bronze,
Outlasting the Soldiers' love?
Can ye glorify it with legends
As grand as their blood hath writ
From the inmost shrine of this land of thine
To the outermost verge of it?

"A monument for the Soldiers!
Built of a people's love,
And blazoned and decked and panoplied
With the hearts ye build it of!
And see that ye build it stately,
In pillar and niche and gate,
And high in pose as the souls of those
It would commemorate!"

But patriotism by no means exhausts itself in war. There is good, rugged philosophy in the Hoosier dialect verses entitled "Thoughts on the Late War." The "Late War" to Riley at that time (1893) was, of course, the Civil War. Though he confesses: "I was for Union—you ag'in' it," yet since the war is "all done and ended," he pleads for "some pard-nership forgittin'," and then this wholesome advice:

> "Le' 's let up on this blame', infernal
> Tongue-lashin' and lap-jacket vauntin',
> And git back home to the eternal
> Ca'm we're a-wantin'."

With like motive, but in more chaste language, our poet laureate concluded his first Decoration Day poem (referred to earlier in this study) in these sweet words:

> "And in the holy silence reigning round,
> While prayers of perfume bless the atmosphere,
> Where loyal souls of love and faith are found,
> Thank God that Peace is here!
>
> "And let each angry impulse that may start,
> Be smothered out of every loyal breast
> And, rocked within the cradle of the heart,
> Let every sorrow rest."

And at another time he rejoiced that:

"The angel, Peace, o'er all uplifts her hand,
Waving the olive, and with heavenly eyes
Shedding a light of love o'er sea and land
As sunshine from the skies."

But in peace as in war, America must remember her messianic mission. Her peace must be a peace founded upon righteousness, and a peace that is safe for Liberty—safe "from Occident to Orient." Thus in the apostrophe to Independence Bell we have the exhortation:

"Ring out the wounds of wrong
That rankle in the breast;
Your music like a slumber-song
Will lull revenge to rest.

"Ring out from Occident
To Orient, and peal
From continent to continent
The mighty joy you feel.

"Ring! Independence Bell!
Ring on till worlds to be
Shall listen to the tale you tell
Of love and Liberty!"

Some of us think that the greatest battle hymn ever written is Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." It first rang out high above the havoc of our Civil War. It is a wonderful thing.

Mrs. Howe certainly must have been divinely inspired when she wrote it. Many feel that it should be our national anthem. Indeed, it might fittingly have been the hymn of the Entente Allies. As an echo of that great hymn Mr. Riley wrote his "Peace Hymn of the Republic" for the Twenty-ninth Encampment of the G. A. R., held at Louisville, Kentucky, in 1895. The figure of the ship upon the sea is sustained throughout—the ship of state that groped through the awful midnight storm of war, until the One who stilled the storm on Galilee walked over our troubled waters, and put His hand upon the storm. The imagery is glowing. Let us sing the entire hymn:

"There's a Voice across the Nation like a mighty ocean-hail,
Borne up from out the Southward as the seas before the gale;
Its breath is in the streaming Flag and in the flying sail—
As we go sailing on.

"'Tis a Voice that we remember—ere its summons soothed as now—
When it rang in battle-challenge, and we answered vow with vow—
With a roar of gun and hiss of sword and crash of prow and prow,
As we went sailing on.

"Our hope sank, even as we saw the sun sink faint and far,—
The Ship of State went groping through the blinding smoke
of War—
Through blackest midnight lurching, all uncheered of moon
or star,
Yet sailing—sailing on.

"As One who spake the dead awake, with life-blood leaping
warm—
Who walked the troubled waters, all unscathed, in mortal
form—
We felt our Pilot's presence with His hand upon the storm,
As we went sailing on.

"O Voice of passion lulled to peace, this dawning of To-day,
O Voices twain now blent as one, ye sing all fears away,
Since foe and foe are friends, and lo! the Lord, as glad as
they,—
He sends us sailing on."

Yea, verily, peace is greatly to be desired; a peace "pedestaled on Freedom's soil." But we might as well admit it one time as another, that we shall have a permanent peace for our own blessed land only when the reign of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is universal. Therefore with our national bard we pray:

"O blessed land of labor and reward!
O gracious Ruler, let Thy reign endure;
In pruning-hook and plough-share beat the sword,
And reap the harvest sure!"

But we must remind ourselves once more that America is the "messiah of nations." At the laying of the cornerstone of Bunker Hill monument, that mountain-minded man, Daniel Webster, said: "Our history hitherto proves that the popular form of government is practicable, and that with wisdom and knowledge men may govern themselves; and the duty incumbent on us is, to preserve the consistency of this cheering example, and take care that nothing may weaken its authority with the world. If, in our case, the representative system ultimately fail, popular governments must be pronounced impossible. No combination of circumstances more favorable to the experiment can ever be expected to occur. The last hope of mankind therefore rests with us."

We must make good. But while we live and fight for our ideals of democracy we must not forget God. Israel was an "elect race"; but Israel fumbled its destiny in the "hour of visitation." We must hold with tenacity to the forces which are eternal, spiritual. We must not forget God! So Mr. Riley would teach us; for at the end of his long poem in praise of Liberty, he says:

"And with Thy praise, we breathe a prayer
That God who leaves you in our care
May favor us from this day on
With Thy dear presence—till the dawn
Of Heaven, breaking on thy face,
Lights up Thy first abiding-place."

THE END

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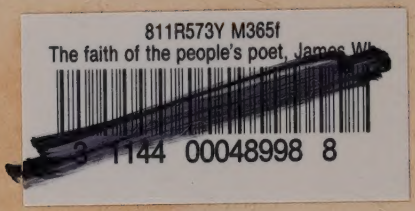
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